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1-1-2019

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Peer Evaluations for Extended Group Projects for a Sales Management Course

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ABSTRACT

This paper presents an evaluation process that has work well for two extended group projects in a sales management course. Students help develop the peer evaluation instrument, submit several peer evaluations over the course of each project, and are required to fill out each form completely and submit the forms on assigned due dates. Students lose points on their individual project scores for not following the evaluation process guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

Given the importance of learning how to work with others for almost any organizational setting, it is beneficial to provide group work activities in the classroom setting. Professors that incorporate group projects in their classes are faced with the dilemma of how to effectively evaluate the contributions of the individual students in each group. In her review of the literature, Baker (2008) concluded that peer evaluations are needed to ensure that the grading process is fair and can also provide students with useful feedback for improved performance. In fact, several authors have suggested the need for effective peer evaluations to help improve student performance, to aid in providing a fair individual grading process, and to try to reduce or eliminate the number of social loafers (Dommeyer 2012; Wagar and Carroll 2012; Kim 2011; Brutus and Donia 2010; Poddar 2010; and Pettinga and Flatto 2010). Based on the need of effective methods for evaluating student performance on group projects, this paper presents a peer evaluation process that is effective for longer group projects that cover several weeks of a semester. This process has been used for several years by a professor teaching sales management at a mid-western University in the United States.

THE GROUP PROJECTS

The professor (author) assigns two group projects in his sales management classes that last for several weeks over the course of the semester. One project is the MARS Sales Management Simulation. For the MARS simulation, students are divided into groups of four students per group. If it doesn't work out for all groups to have four students, the students will be divided so remaining groups have three students. Each student group represents a district management team that manages five sales representatives (reps). Each student management team competes against

the other teams in the class by making several decisions to try to motivate their sales reps and satisfy the sales reps' customers. The management teams make decisions in the following areas: salary dollars, commission rates, bonus dollars, sales volume quotas, percent of time supervising each rep, percent of time reps spend with A, B, C accounts, sales rep training, recognition, and sales contests. The better the mix of decisions for each team's reps, the better the sales reps perform. Each management team makes the above decisions on a quarterly basis for five years; therefore, each management team makes a total of 20 quarterly decisions for the MARS project. Two quarterly decisions are made per week of the semester; therefore, the MARS simulation project covers 10 weeks of the semester.

The second group project in the author's sales management class is a final report based on the MARS simulation. Students are required to prepare a final report detailing how their company and sales reps performed compared to the other companies. The report includes five annual summary sections for the five years of the simulation, a section detailing how the management team made each of the decisions for their sales reps, and a section where each manager in the management team provides feedback on the MARS simulation as a learning tool. Each management team report includes over thirty tables of data to aid in the comparative analysis. Students begin working on the year one summary for the report as soon as the year one results are available to the students (i.e. two weeks into the MARS simulation), and students have approximately 10 weeks to complete the report. The report normally ranges between 35 to 45 pages in length.

DEVELOPING THE EVALUATION INSTRUMENT

In Sales Management courses, professors discuss how sales managers evaluate sales reps. Sales managers do not, and should not, use sales volume as the only measure of sales performance. Using only sales volume can lead to unfair comparisons among sales reps due to different experience levels and/or different territory sales potentials. Therefore, in most business to business sales situations, sales managers will use other items such as percent of quota, activity quotas (e.g. average number of calls per day, percentage of calls on A accounts, percentage of callbacks on A accounts, number of products discussed per call), application of sales techniques (e.g. effective opening, assessing needs, presentation, handling objections, closing) and a variety of personality elements (e.g. attitude, punctuality, enthusiasm, initiative, self-motivation). Not only should a sales manager give each sales rep a rating for each evaluation item, but the manager should also provide feedback on the basis for the rating received for each item.

Based on a discussion with students on how to develop an effective evaluation instrument, the professor uses part of a class period to work with the sales management students to develop effective evaluation instruments for the two class projects. The process begins with the professor asking students what items they believe are important for group success when working on a group project. The list of items is typed in the computer and projected on a screen for all students to see. The items on the list are discussed in more detail and some items are eliminated based on similarity to other items. The resulting peer evaluation instrument is presented in Appendix A. Please note, the evaluation instrument contains ten items which are rated on an eleven-point scale ranging from 5.0 for poor, 7.5 for average, and 10.0 for excellent. This rating scale makes it

easier for students when rating each of their group members because the totals for each manager are based on 100 points; therefore, it is just like grading scales the students have been exposed to for most of their educational careers. At the bottom of the evaluation form, students are instructed to provide written feedback for each manager in the group on the back of the form to help explain the ratings assigned to each manager. Once the evaluation form was finalized for the MARS simulation group project, the professor uses the same process to create an evaluation instrument for the final report. As shown in Appendix B, this process resulted in an evaluation instrument very similar to the evaluation instrument created for the MARS simulation project.

THE PEER EVALUATION PROCESS

Once the evaluation instruments are created for both projects, the author explains the evaluation process to the sales management students. For the MARS simulation project, students are informed that they will complete six evaluation forms over the course of the simulation project. One evaluation form for each of the five years of the MARS simulation. Therefore, with two quarterly decisions in a week, students submit a peer evaluation form every two weeks during the project. The forms are due the next class period following each fourth quarter decision. The forms are labelled as Year 1, Year 2, etc., so that students know which form to submit on the corresponding due date. The sixth evaluation form is an "overall project" peer evaluation where students indicate how they feel each student in their group performed over the course of the entire MARS simulation project. For the final report group project, students are informed that they will complete four peer evaluations over the course of the project which are labelled Eval #1, Eval #2, Eval #3, and Overall Project. The evaluations for the final report are assigned due dates by the professor which are approximately every three weeks once the final report project begins. Therefore, for both group projects combined, students are required to submit ten peer evaluations over the course of the semester.

Students are informed that the peer evaluations are completely confidential and should not be shared with any other students. The author emphasizes the confidentiality of the process to help encourage honest feedback on the peer evaluation forms. Students are also informed that the evaluation forms are to be completed before entering the classroom on the due dates and that there is a penalty for working on peer evaluations in class (a 3-point deduction from the student's individual project grade for each instance). Again, this is done to help maintain the confidentiality of the process. Students can submit each evaluation form on or before the due date by handing the form to the professor before class begins, sliding the form under the professor's office door, or by handing the form to the department secretary to have it placed in the professor's mailbox. Students cannot have another student submit peer evaluations for them. The form must be submitted by each individual student.

Students are also informed that once the professor has the first set of evaluations (two weeks into the project) for the MARS simulation, each group's set of evaluations is reviewed to see if there are any concerns about students not pulling their weight. If there are concerns noticed, the professor discusses the concerns with the entire class to let students know there are issues. Once the professor receives the second set of peer evaluations for the MARS simulation (four weeks into the project), the professor reviews each group's set of evaluations for concerns. If the

professor notices continued issues with a student's participation in a group, the professor will meet with those specific groups to discuss the importance of everyone contributing to the project. The professor speaks to the group as a whole without specifically indicating which student(s) are not contributing. If there is still an issue with a student after the third set of peer evaluations are collected (2 or 3 sets of poor evaluations from their group), those students not pulling their weight will receive a warning letter from the regional manager's office (the professor). The warning letter indicates that the student in question has the final two evaluation periods to improve his/her performance or will be fired from the group. A student receiving the warning letter is told not to discuss the letter with his/her group and to continue to work with the group in a professional manner. Failure to work in a professional manner after receiving a warning letter results in immediate expulsion from the group. If a student is fired from the group, that student is required to complete the final report project alone (which is a time-consuming task). The same type of process is followed for submitting and reviewing the peer evaluations for the final report. The entire peer evaluation process described above is shared with the entire sales management class right after completion of the evaluation instruments and before the project begins.

PEER EVALUATION IMPACT ON GRADING PROCESS

The professor assigns a grade for each of the above projects for each sales management group. However, the group evaluation process can have a positive or negative impact on each individual student's grade. Adjustments made to individual students' grades are as follows:

- Submitting the Wrong Evaluation Form (-2 point each)
- Submitting a Late Evaluation Form (-2 point each)
- Submitting an Incomplete Evaluation Form (-2 point each)
- Submitting an Evaluation Form more than two weeks after the due date (-4 points each)
- Working on a group evaluation form in the classroom (-3 points each instance)
- Not submitting an Evaluation Form (-5 points each)
- Group Evaluation Ratings (+/- points, points depend on contributions compared to group members based on all group evaluations collected)

In the MARS simulation, the students play the role of District Managers while the professor plays the role of the Regional Manager. In class, the professor emphasizes the importance of District Managers reporting to upper management in a timely manner. District Managers must complete and submit paperwork to upper management and meet the deadlines set by upper management. Failure to submit the paperwork or to meet the deadlines typically will have negative consequences when the District Manager is being evaluated by upper management. The professor uses this evaluation process as an example of the importance of the student District Managers completing the peer evaluation forms accurately and submitting the forms on time. If the student District Managers do not submit the forms on time and accurately, they lose points on their projects. In other words, there are negative consequences.

The professor also makes it clear that students can earn additional points on their individual grades if they are rated as being a top contributor or group leader for the project or can lose

points on their individual grade if the peer evaluations indicate they did not contribute as much as other group members. For example, if the group evaluations clearly indicate that two group members did more work that the other two members in the group, the professor will add points to the two top contributors and subtract points from the bottom two contributors. The amount of points added or deducted is at the discretion of the professor based on the feedback of all the peer evaluations collected from all group members for each project. Therefore, since there are 6 evaluations for the MARS project, the professor considers the feedback on 24 peer evaluation forms from a four-member student group when adjusting individual grades for the MARS simulation project. Since there are 4 peer evaluations for the final report project, there are 16 peer evaluation forms for each student group for the professor to review for the final report group project for 4-member student groups.

SUMMARY

This paper presents an effective method for conducting peer evaluations over the course of lengthy group projects. The evaluation process is designed to give the professor feedback on areas of group work that need improvement for specific students. The process is also designed to get more accurate and honest feedback; therefore, making the assignment of individual grades more efficient for the professor. Finally, the evaluation process is also designed to reduce social loafing due to the possibility of a student being fired by his/her group.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Joe Chapman, a professor in the Marketing Department at Ball State University, earned his doctorate from Virginia Polytechnic and State University (Virginia Tech). He joined the Ball State faculty in 1987. Dr. Chapman's teaching focuses on professional selling, sales management, and marketing principles. He was instrumental in the establishment and growth of Ball State's nationally recognized sales program. The sales program has been listed as one of the nation's best by several national publications. Chapman has published research in several well-known business journals including the *Journal of Personal Selling and Sales Management*, the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, the *Review of Business*, the *Journal of the International Society of Business Disciplines*, the *Journal of Business and Society*, the *Marketing and Management Journal*, and the *Marketing Education Review*. Chapman is an experienced business consultant. His consulting has focused on sales training, sales rep selection, and customer and employee satisfaction.

Russell Wahlers is the chairman of the Marketing Department at Ball State University. He joined the Ball State faculty in 1989. He received his DBA (1981) degree from Kent State University. Prior to joining the Ball State faculty, he taught at the University of Notre Dame, John Carroll University, and Kent State University. Dr. Wahlers' industry experience includes assignments at The BFGoodrich Engineered Systems Company in Market Research, Business Planning, and Corporate Purchasing. His teaching interests are in the areas of Consumer Behavior and Marketing Simulation. He has had articles published in the *Journal of Marketing Theory and Practice*, *Advances in Consumer Research*, *International Journal of Retailing and Distribution Management*, *Journal of Leisure Research*, *Journal of Travel Research*, *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, *Review of Business*, and *Marketing Intelligence and Planning*.

Simulation District Manager Group Evaluation Form   Year 1

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Company: _____

	PERFECT				AVG					POOR
Scale	10	9.5	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5

Manager Names: (including yourself)				
Evaluation Items	Rating	Rating	Rating	Rating
Attendance at meetings				
Promptness to meetings				
Preparation for meetings				
Quantity of work on decisions				
Quality of work on decisions				
Attitude toward other managers				
Attitude toward project				
Leadership				
Communication with managers				
Cooperativeness				
Ratings Total				

Comments to support these ratings **MUST** be provided for **each manager** on the back of this page!

Final Report Group Evaluation Form   Eval #1

Evaluator: _____ Date: _____

Company: _____

	PERFECT				AVG					POOR
Scale	10	9.5	9	8.5	8	7.5	7	6.5	6	5.5	5

Manager Names: (including yourself)				
Evaluation Items	Rating	Rating	Rating	Rating
Attendance at meetings				
Promptness to meetings				
Preparation for meetings				
Quantity of work on report				
Quality of work on report				
Attitude toward other managers				
Attitude toward project				
Leadership				
Communication with managers				
Cooperativeness				
Ratings Total				

Comments to support these ratings **MUST** be provided for **each manager** on the back of this page!