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Peer evaluation: design and implementation of the peer evaluation format

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Peer Evaluation:

Design and Implementation

Of The Peer Evaluation Format

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By

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Abstract

The following study examined the feasibility of using peer evaluation at a behavioral health center for assessing employee attitudes regarding the company's appraisal process. A total of 30 subjects, both male and female, were chosen from a single department to pilot the peer evaluation. Subjects were surveyed in order to assess attitudes toward the process prior to participation. An outside corporation was chosen to assist in the selection of peer evaluation questions as well as compiling final ratings of each participant. A post peer evaluation survey assessed attitudes upon completion of the peer evaluation. Responses were averaged and percentages analyzed to determine whether participants were pleased with the peer evaluation process. Prior to participating in peer evaluation, only 17 % of respondents rated their attitude toward peer evaluation as fair; meaning that they felt peer evaluation was a good addition to the current evaluation process. After completing the peer evaluation, 23.5 % of survey respondents rated the process as fair.

Design and Implementation

of the Peer Evaluation Format

The employee evaluation and performance appraisal process can be one of

considerable scope and depth. Appraisal techniques used to evaluate employees

vary from organization to organization with peer evaluation and assessment being a

fairly new area in the employee appraisal process. These multirater reviews (also

referred to as "multi-perspective" ratings, full-scale feedback, or 360's) require a

significant amount of work and planning for the Human Resource Department as

well as employee participation throughout the appraisal process (Employers

Resource Corporation, 1997). Cascio (1991) points out that peer assessments have

considerable potential as effective predictors of managerial success. It has also

been repeatedly suggested and demonstrated that peer assessment as a source of

performance appraisal has high reliability and validity (Farh, Cannella, & Bedeian,

1991). For these reasons and numerous others, increasing numbers of organizations

are implementing peer appraisal processes.

When implementing the peer evaluation process, many issues must be

considered. These include, but are not limited to, issues such as: who will be

considered the peer of each employee, how will the appraisal process control for

bias due to the influence of friendship, how will the cooperation of staff be secured

in planning and designing the process, how an appeals process will be incorporated into the appraisal system, how the performance criteria will clearly be specified upon which peer assessments will be based, and how the required length of job relevant peer interaction will be determined and agreed upon by employees / management? These issues are discussed in more detail in the following sections of the paper.

Peer Consideration

It is very important, when planning a peer evaluation process, to decide exactly who the peers will be for each employee. It is paramount that at least three peers be chosen for each employee (R. Reik, personal communication, October 10, 1997). In a true peer rating system, everyone is both a rater and ratee (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Once the peers have been selected, they will play both roles of rating peer performance and being rated by other peers in the peer performance appraisal process.

When implementing a new process into an organization, it is a good idea to keep the employees abreast of the new process. Employees need to understand and feel a part of the new program in order for them to accept it readily. For this reason, some companies permit the employee to choose the peer reviewers, while others authorize the supervisors or the Human Resources Department to make the selection

of peer reviewers (Human Resources Library on CD, 1993, 1997). Allowing

employees to pick their own reviewers should reduce their resistance to the new

process. The Human Resources Library on CD (1993-1997) points out that it may

be difficult for the supervisor to observe the employee often enough to make an

informed judgement of that worker's performance, which is one of the HR Library's

strongest reasons for supporting organization's implementation of a peer review

process.

There is a need to operationally define the concept of "peer" for each

individual employee. Research has shown that peer ratings are fairly reliable only

when the peers who make the ratings are similar to and well acquainted with the

employees being rated (Landy & Guion, 1970; as cited in Aamodt, 1991).

For many organizations, the exact same position may be held in different

physical locations. An example of this would be the job of administrative assistants

or secretaries. One organization may have three locations within a 50 mile radius

with one administrative aide at each of the three locations. The job descriptions of

these individuals would be the same; however, according to Aamodt (1991), they

will not be considered peers because of lack of proximity. If the individuals do not

interact with each other, they will not be in a position to evaluate reliably.

According to Murphy and Cleveland (1991) a co-worker who is at an individual's

side all day has an excellent opportunity to observe that individual's behavior, and is

likely to record different observations than would be obtained from a disinterested

passive observer. As can be seen in the table below (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991,

p.107), peers are the only organizational appraisal source who have frequent contact

with their peer employees in the most commonly assessed categories of evaluative

criteria (e.g. task performance and interpersonal behavior).

Source:	Subordinates	Self	Peers	Supervisors	Management

TASK ↘

Behaviors:	Rare	Always	Frequent	Occasional	Rare
Results:	Occasional	Frequent	Frequent	Frequent	Occasional

INTERPERSONAL ↘

Behaviors:	Frequent	Always	Frequent	Occasional	Rare
Results:	Frequent	Frequent	Frequent	Occasional	Rare

When considering both job tasks and interpersonal skills, peers are the only

source that will frequently be observers of not only the behaviors, but also the

results of the behaviors of their peer co-workers. Upper management has virtually

no direct observation of employee behaviors, or the results of those behaviors on

any level. Indeed, in Wexley and Klimoski's (1984) review of the research on peer

performance appraisals, they concluded that the information possessed by peers concerning employee performance may in fact be more accurate than that possessed by any other rater. Barclay and Harland (1995) also state that peer appraisals may be a necessity because supervisors or administrators are not capable of accurately evaluating performance due to a lack of knowledge about the individual's particular specialty area of performance / expertise.

When deciding who each employee's peer will be, we must consider interpersonal and demographic aspects. Examples of such interpersonal and/or demographic factors are employee tenure, pay grade position, or education level. Barclay and Harland (1995) report the following: Academic tenure was found to be negatively related to peer appraisal acceptance in University settings. The notion of rater competence may account for this finding in that tenured professors may feel that few peers are capable of evaluating them competently due to their advanced levels of experience and knowledge. Such procedures may also be viewed as disrespectful because peers with less education and / or experience are used to evaluate the ratee's performance (Barclay & Harland, 1995).

Control For Bias

As with any appraisal process, we must attempt to control for any intervening variables that we are aware of, and those that we may suspect. One such variable is

bias due to the friendship factor. Because peers are (by definition) at the same or similar levels in the organizational hierarchy in comparison to the ratee, peers are more likely to have an interpersonal relationship with the ratee and are more likely to be in direct competition with the ratee for organizational rewards (Barclay & Harland, 1995). Barclay and Harland (1995) state that both circumstances can lead to an increased potential for bias (either positive or negative) on the part of the rater toward the ratee.

Borman, White and Dorsey (1995), stated that ratee friendliness and likability have a large effect on performance ratings, and that peers clearly rate their obnoxious coworkers, characterized as being irritable, moody, mean, complaining, and rude, lower than they do their more pleasant peer counterparts. Their research results were generated from interpersonal ratings, job performance ratings, and ratee scores on ability, job knowledge, and technical proficiency from 560 first-tour U.S. Army soldiers. It would be understood at this point that not being friendly with the rater would be detrimental to the evaluation process.

Further research has revealed that it is widely believed that friendship between peers will lead to inflated ratings (Landy & Farr, 1983; as cited in Murphy and Cleveland, 1991). However, there is little evidence that friendship bias is an important factor, although bias might be a problem if the ratee is aware of individual

rater's scores (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Organizations should begin to explore training of employees on such possibilities of bias. Organizations should explain to employees that "friendship bias" is a potential problem, but is likely to "average out" across multiple raters, providing you are using the multiple rater system (Human Resources Library on CD, 1993,1997).

Negative reactions are not going to be uncommon. The Human Resources Library on CD (1993,1997) states that negative reactions may arise from fears that peers will be too lenient in their evaluations or give undeserved high ratings to friends and low ratings to co-workers they dislike, creating tensions or overt conflicts among employees. Experts think such fears are unfounded, pointing out that all ratings, whatever their source, are influenced by evaluators' feelings toward those they are assessing. One way to combat such bias would be to control for extremely high or low appraisals. Performance ratings could be gathered from five raters for each ratee, the lowest and highest ratings would be removed, and the remaining three ratings averaged to obtain an overall rating (Barclay & Harland, 1995). By using multiple anonymous raters, and discounting the high and low ratings, we are able to partially control for potential bias.

Staff Cooperation

Peer review is for the benefit of the employees and their working conditions.

The primary goal of peer review is to determine "what's right" rather than "who's right". Ventura and Harvey (1997) state that the basic concept of peer review is quite simple - managers and employees work together in a team to evaluate employee job performance and to address individual employee complaints regarding the fair and consistent application of company policies, procedures and practices.

Without the cooperation from the employees who will complete the peer review, the peer appraisal process will be pointless. Peer review is a highly trusted dispute-resolution process that significantly reduces exposure to litigation and third-party intervention (Dispute Resolution Systems, 1997). The willingness of individuals to cooperate with other members of an organization is one of the major determinants of organizational effectiveness and efficiency (Kramer, 1993). Peer evaluation supports TQM (Total Quality Management) and reengineering efforts (MBD, Inc., 1997). The peer process should be assimilated into the organization with cooperation from all levels of organizational development.

A need for trust must continually be reinforced throughout the process. Creating trust in the organization by involving staff in critical decision making, assists the peer process (Human Resources Library on CD, 1993,1997). Ventura and Harvey (1997) point out that shared decision making is based on trust, and trust builds trust. A trustful management sees employees as being responsible people

capable of making balanced decisions.

Resistance to peer ratings can be traced to concerns over role reversals and concerns over distortion (Murphy & Cleveland, 1991). Distortion in this case refers to ratings being either too lenient or strict depending on whether a peer wants to help or hinder their peer counterpart. Again, the employee should be involved in the peer process not only from the evaluated and evaluatee positions, but also from the implementation and design angles. Employee involvement may be instituted in many ways. Barclay and Harland (1995) state that employees rate the appraisal system more positively when the performance criteria are job relevant, when the subordinate had an opportunity to present his or her side during the evaluation, and when the performance evaluation system resulted in plans and goals to improve performance.

The last two dimensions that add to staff cooperation are rater training and an appeals process. An appeals process should consist of a hierarchy of appeal stages / levels. The first appeal should be to their team, the second appeal to the manager or supervisor, and the third to the Human Resources Department (CSWT, 1996). With an appeals process in place, the employee will feel more power and / or voice in the rating process as a whole.

Rater training further increases staff cooperation and awareness of what

errors are likely to occur, and possibly how to avoid making them. The Human

Resources Library on CD (1993,1997) supports the idea of rater training. They feel

that if you neglect training the employees on all aspects of the review process, they

will not receive it as openly.

Murphy and Cleveland (1991) list leniency (the tendency of a rater to place

high scores on all dimensions regardless of actual performance), central tendency

(characterized by raters judging the ratee as average on all dimensions regardless of

actual performance), and halo (being aware of one good trait about the ratee and

consequently rating that ratee high on all dimensions), as the common rater errors.

Their recommended rater training strategies are (1) FOR- Frame of Reference, (2)

RET- Rater Error Training, (3) ROT- Rater Observation Training, and (4) DMT-

Decision Making Training. FOR training will provide a sample of behavioral

incidents representing each dimension of performance which will give the rater a

prototype for effective performance on each of the dimensions. RET training

focuses on educating raters on common rating errors such as halo and leniency.

ROT training uses videotapes aimed at reducing errors through intensive training in

making correct observations. DMT training focuses on shortcomings of human

inference such as noting correlations where there actually are none, and emphasizing

the importance of objective evaluative decisions. All of these training techniques

not only identify the common errors made when evaluating, but more importantly

explain how to avoid them.

Performance Criteria

In order to properly rate all employees, we must perform a thorough job

analysis, and develop specific performance criteria on which to assess each

individual. No matter what performance criteria are selected, or their level of

objectivity, Barclay and Harland (1995) still suggest the designing of an acceptable,

yet feasible, rating appeals procedure. This will again allow the employee a voice in

the final evaluation of his or her work performance.

It is not only the objective to choose proper performance criteria, but to also

specify who will choose those criteria. Managers and employees generally work

together to determine what those performance criteria are, and how they can best be

described and evaluated (Human Resources Library on CD, 1993,1997). This

process tends to improve communication between managers and employees as they

explore what is most valued and required by the organization.

Performance criteria must be linked to team goals and objectives. Teams

have specific goals which cannot be accomplished unless everyone participates and

works together toward the performance of those goals (Peer Evaluation, 1997).

Organizational performance criteria should therefore assess the performance goals

of those whom it appraises. It is also noted in Borman, White, and Dorsey (1995)

that the ratee dependability / trustworthy / likability constructs are important

contributors to group cohesiveness and therefore are important contributors to

performance ratings made by peers. Therefore, these areas would be good

dimensions to include on the peer appraisal form. Several additional criteria which

have been suggested for use with peer appraisal include teamwork, participation,

work ethic, communication, decision making, leadership, quality, diversity,

willingness to volunteer, attentiveness, preparation, courtesy, open-mindedness, and

knowledge expertise of the particular job that the person fills (BUS 760, 1997).

Length of peer interaction

In order for the peer review to work, peers must interact so that they will

have adequate observations of the daily chores and responsibilities of their peer

counterparts. The frequency with which individuals at different levels in the

organization encounter information about behaviors and results will vary, both as a

function of the job itself (e.g., proximity between workers at different levels) and as

a function of the roles of the observer and the person being observed (Murphy &

Cleveland, 1991).

Some sources say that simply interacting with peers on a daily basis is all that

is necessary for the peer review process. Co-worker reviews may be highly reliable

because of the daily interactions of colleagues with the employee being appraised;

co-workers have a unique perspective on the employee's job performance, since

they are able to observe the employee performing the job and interacting with other

co-workers, subordinates, and supervisors (Human Resources Library on CD,

1993,1997). These daily interactions will provide information to raters which will

allow them to accurately gauge the peer's performance. However, ratee

obnoxiousness appears to influence peer raters much more than it does supervisor

raters (Borman, White, & Dorsey, 1995). In comparison with other rating sources,

this shows the influence of the peer rater having more frequent contact with the

peer's behaviors, and results of those behaviors.

As mentioned earlier (Barclay & Harland, 1995) rater competence, education

level, experience and knowledge will play a role in the peer review process. Those

with more similar qualities and frequent interactions are going to be better reviewers

for each other, respectively, and they will be in a position to complete the peer

review sooner than those with differing backgrounds. Barclay and Harland (1995)

found positive fairness and satisfaction main effects for rater competence, education,

and experience factors. This field experiment, which used 359 public health nurses

as subjects, utilized procedural justice theory as a framework for investigating the

impact of the following three peer rating system characteristics on fairness

perceptions: rater competence, rater location, and rating correctability (i.e., the

opportunity to correct errors in the appraisal). Their results supported the

hypotheses that rater competence and rating correctability will positively influence

fairness perceptions. So if we pick an employee's peers who have not only worked

together, but who also share common backgrounds, are perceived as important, and

are using an evaluation process that allows for corrections of poor ratings, we will

have a reasonable platform for the peer review procedure.

Acceptance of Process

Employee acceptance is a major key to ensuring the effective implementation

of the peer evaluation process. Involving employees from beginning to end is one

way of enhancing participant acceptance of the new process. Nothing is more likely

to increase participation than involving employees throughout the process. Staff

surveys prior to implementation will reveal pre-existing attitudes of what raters

expect to happen while a post peer evaluation survey allows the peer raters to share

attitudes and opinions they have after actually completing the peer evaluation

process. At the point in the process that information has been gathered on rater

attitude, one is able to assess benefits and problems with acceptance of the process.

Murphy and Cleveland (1991) state that performance appraisals that

incorporate input from peers are often not well received where they are applied.

This may act as a barrier when organizations require or ask employees to utilize the

peer evaluation procedure. The issue of rater bias may be a central issue affecting

the acceptability of peer appraisals. Research, however, appears to offer more

support for peer appraisal's fairness as opposed to its biases. Pertinent research

should be made apparent to raters that are being introduced to the peer evaluation

process so that they may have current positive information concerning biases of

these appraisals.

It has been found that user acceptance of peer ratings is more favorable when

ratings are used for developmental (i.e. counseling) rather than evaluative (e.g.

wages) purposes (Farh, Cannella, & Bedeian, 1991). We must not only take into

consideration what our peer reviews will be used for, but also make certain that our

employees remain aware of their implications as well. If our peer raters are aware

of the purpose for the peer evaluation, participant acceptance will be enhanced.

The Present Study

The present study will assess the employee peer evaluation process in a

mental health agency. The agency presently utilizes only supervisory evaluations of

their staff. The Human Resources Department would like to see a system that will

give a more thorough view of the performance of each of its employees while

increasing valuable feedback for each employee. It is hypothesized by the Human

Resource Department that a peer review process will increase the amount of valid

feedback obtained by the organization concerning employee knowledge, skills,

abilities, productivity and other relevant issues in comparison to its present

supervisory evaluation process.

The Human Resources Department further hypothesizes that the new peer

evaluation process will provide employees with a feeling of self worth because they

will now be able to voice opinions on staffing issues. Current employee attitudes

reported by the Human Resources office are often feelings of vulnerability to their

supervisor due to him or her being the only source of feedback on their work

performance.

Method

The agency under investigation serves a four county area in western West

Virginia. It is one of fourteen non-profit community mental health providers in the

state. The agency mainly serves outpatient clients although it maintains residential

care facilities as well. There are approximately three hundred and fifty employees.

Those employed include staff psychiatrists, licensed psychologists, registered

nurses, licensed practical nurses, master's level counselors, other bachelor degreed

staff, and non-degreed assistant personnel.

The agency provides care on many levels, including a twenty four hour

mobile crisis team, case management teams that assess in the home, outpatient as well as inpatient counseling services, and many other services for specified groups of individuals. Inpatient treatment may be received at the Crisis Residential Unit which stabilizes clients for their successful return into the community, with the hopes of avoiding psychiatric hospitalization. The patients are assigned to the appropriate department, such as Children's, Adult Outpatient, Geriatric Outpatient, or Substance Abuse Treatment to name several. Working with other area providers, the agency increases its resources to offer the finest possible care to its clientele.

Employees currently fulfill seven days of training. This training consists of First Aid, Adult CPR, Non-violent Crisis Prevention and Intervention, Therapeutic Crisis Intervention, Infection Control, Total Quality Management, Basic Living Skills, and other Medicaid Required training. In addition to the current training regimen, future training will include a training session designed to assist the employee in using the peer form to its highest potential.

The facility evaluates its employees on a yearly basis. New employees are evaluated 90 and 180 days after the first day of employment. Thereafter, they are evaluated by their supervisor yearly unless they are on an improved performance plan. An improved performance plan is created for those employees who are on probation for disciplinary reasons. One such example would be low productivity

levels measured by the amount of time that the clinician is spending with clients.

This improved performance plan will outline what the clinician must do in order to

begin meeting productivity levels. If the levels are not met within the specified

period of time, termination of employment is imminent. When on the improved

performance plan, employees are evaluated after 90 days, then again in 180 days. If

they have sufficiently increased their rating of performance, they will again revert to

the yearly supervisory performance appraisal.

<div align="center">Procedure</div>

The main objective of the present study is to implement a user friendly peer

review form that will more efficiently report / evaluate employee performance.

Employees will be involved in the implementation and design of the peer format. All

employees at the agency received a survey form consisting of the following

questions:

①   On a scale of 1 = comfortable; 2 = indifferent; 3 = uncomfortable; how would you feel about

     rating the following persons: :____Your supervisor

                                 :____A Peer you've worked with less than 4 months

                                 :____A Peer with more experience than you

②   Using the above scale, who of the following would you be most comfortable with compiling

      the evaluations about you?   : ____ Human Resource Office

                                                           : ____ Your Supervisor

                                                           : ____ Supervisor outside of your department

③   Do you feel the Peer Evaluation process has potential to be: (please circle one)

      Fair   -   Extremely subjective   -   A gripe session   -   Improvement to current system

④   Do you feel the Peer process needs to be a completely separate tool, or should it be

      compiled with the current system to obtain one performance rating per employee-

                           Separate tool   -   Combine scores (please circle one)

Additional Comments:

The feedback received has alerted the Human Resources Department to make

clear the purpose of the peer evaluation. Clarification of who will evaluate each

employee, maintaining anonymity, and controlling for the possibility of friendship or

sabotage bias will attempt to address the voiced concerns.

In addition to the initial questionnaire, supervisors were asked to give

feedback on the proposed peer review form. The original peer review form (See

Appendix A) has been shortened in length per staff suggestion after reviewing the

original form. The revised peer evaluation form is presented below.

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION FORM

Name	Position
Evaluation Period	Date of Evaluation

1 = Always

2 = Frequently

3 = Generally

4 = Sometimes

5 = Never

6 = Not Applicable or Do Not Know

Team Building Skills

	1	2	3	4	5	6
Shares information, ideas with others						
Has good listening skills						
Responds to internal customers (co-workers)						
Builds strong relationships						
Can motivate, inspire peers and others						
Considers impact of decisions on others						
Builds consensus for decisions when possible						
Encourages, supports other's ideas						

Meets commitments to co-workers						
Considers co-workers' schedules, commitments when planning						
Takes active role in solving team problems						
Works well in groups						
Helps resolve conflict						
Encourages collaboration						
Promotes mutual respect						
Works well with other departments						
Helps keep team focused on key results						

Personal and Professional Job Skills

Responds professionally, stays calm, easy to work with when under pressure						
Communicates clearly and directly						
Written documentation clear, thorough, and easy to understand						
Delivers good presentations, speaks well in front of groups						
Keeps job knowledge current, looks for learning opportunities						
Solicits performance feedback, handles constructive criticism						
Develops meeting agendas and sets goals for meetings when in charge						
Accepts personal accountability for failure as well as success						
Makes logical, systematic decisions						
Takes independent action when appropriate						
Keeps information organized and accessible						
Manages a fair workload						
Doesn't rely on others to double-check his/her work						
Is attentive to detail and accuracy						
Keeps workplace clean, neat, and safe						

Supports organizational policies						
Has necessary job knowledge						
Has necessary technical skills to perform job duties						
Establishes and works toward goals						
Makes a conscious effort not to embarrass others or to gossip						
Is comfortable leading or letting others lead						
Reports progress or challenges in meeting goals or performing tasks						
Tells the truth without compromising confidentiality in all dealings						
Arrives for work and meetings prepared						
Arrives for work and meetings on time and is regular in attendance						
Conveys a positive attitude						

Client/Customer Orientation

Takes ownership of external customer satisfaction						
Takes initiative to solve customer problems						
Seeks out customer input						
Sets realistic customer expectations						
Attempts to anticipate customer needs						
Willing to try new procedures in order to improve customer satisfaction						
Reaches out to be helpful to customers						
Communicates appropriately at the level of the customer						
Maintains complete, accurate, concise documentation concerning customers						
Utilizes all available resources to address customer needs						

Delivers services in a competent, thorough manner within established procedures					
Advocates as appropriate for both internal and external customers					

Progressive Tendencies

Is flexible and open-minded					
Can be persuasive and convincing					
Is open to new ideas					
Will volunteer for new work/responsibilities when needed to help the team					
Can make difficult or unpopular decision					
Takes initiative to improve own performance					
Generates new ideas and challenges the status quo					
Supports change					
Doesn't wait for others to "fix things"					
Continuously looks for ways to make improvements or alternative solutions					
Delegates as appropriate while retaining ultimate responsible					
Has computer/technical knowledge appropriate for the job					

This form was piloted within one department consisting of 30 individuals.

After educating and training the staff on the peer evaluation process, they were

assigned to respective peers by both their supervisor and their own personal choice.

At least two peers but no more than 8 were utilized in the evaluation of each

employee. In those with 5 or more reviewers, the high and low scores were

eliminated to attempt the control of bias due to friendship or sabotage.

After further analysis, Employers Resource Corporation (ERC) was chosen to anonymously compile the results of the peer evaluation. ERC assisted in the final selection of performance appraisal questions as well. Questions from our revised form were again revised and compiled into a total of 18 characteristics. The rating scale was 5 = very satisfied, 4 = somewhat satisfied, 3 = neutral, 2 = somewhat dissatisfied, 1 = very dissatisfied, and 0 = don't know / not sure. The questions were as follows:

Communication

1. Responds to and shares information with co-workers

2. Communicates clearly and is rarely subject to misinterpretation

3. Utilizes good listening skills to work well with other departments

4. Accepts criticism constructively

Teamwork & Relationships

5. Motivates, inspires, encourages and supports co-workers and customers

6. Meets commitments to and maintains focus on team efforts

7. Takes an active role in working well within groups to solve programmatic

   problems

Customer Focus

8. Utilizes available resources to be helpful in assisting customers

Job Knowledge

9. Maintains current knowledge relevant to work

Initiative

10. Takes independent action as needed, not waiting to be told if there is something

     to be done

11. Will volunteer for new work / responsibilities when needed to help the team

Working Effectively

12. Remains calm and handles stress well

13. Accepts responsibility for failure as well as success

14. Is attentive to detail and accuracy

15. Arrives for work and meetings on time and prepared

Innovation

16. Generates new ideas

Self Development

17. Knows his / her own strengths and weaknesses

18. Takes initiative to improve his / her own performance

Thirty employees in one department were chosen to pilot the peer evaluation. These thirty individuals received training on how to accurately rate the performance of others as effectively as possible. The purpose for peer evaluation was explained by the Human Resources Director, then a training session followed which included discussions of:

A. Most common rating errors

    1. Leniency / Severity

        The tendency of a rater to place high or low scores on all dimensions regardless of actual performance. Possible causes: *desire to be liked, *unwilling to give + or - feedback, *fear that others will inflate / deflate their ratings, *abnormally low / high standards.

    2. Central Tendency

        The tendency of a rater to judge the ratee as average on all dimensions regardless of actual performance. Possible causes: *unwilling to stick one's neck out, *inadequate observations, *unwilling to justify low / high ratings.

    3. Halo Effect

        A rater's tendency to be aware of one good / bad trait about the ratee and consequently rating that person low / high on all dimensions

(inaccurate correlations). Two types: *true halo- the possibility of a

ratee being low / high on all dimensions even though the dimensions

may be conceptually distinct. *illusory halo- lump dimensions into a

global category and make a correlation where one does not exist.

B. Rater Observation Training

    1. Carefully observe situations (Elizabeth Loftus research on eye witness

       testimony / leading questions)

    2. Importance of correct observations: DO NOT assume anything!

    3. Watch for specific behaviors and take notes if possible

    4. Contamination from prior information and over reliance on single source

       of information

    5. Opportunity / frequency of observations

C. Question / Answer period

During the training session, the importance of anonymity was emphasized.

Participants were encouraged either to complete their evaluations at home or a

private office where no one would interrupt them. They were also encouraged to

tell no one who they were rating in order to further secure anonymity.

After training, the peer raters were given sealed envelopes with the list of 18

questions and rating forms to fill out on each peer they were to rate. A two week

period was allotted for all evaluators to complete their performance appraisals of their peers. Each participant was rated by four peer evaluators. Final scores were entered into the ERC database by either calling the 800 telephone number, or accessing the internet site that was designed by ERC.

A review of the current system lead to the implementation of a peer review process to be added to the now present supervisory evaluations. Peer review will institute a 360° format for performance evaluation. A 360° format means that input from numerous sources, including supervisors, peers, and subordinates, will allow the employee a voice in evaluation decisions and scores. With the turnover rate at 34%, the agency would like to investigate ways of increasing its employee tenure, with the peer review as one of its efforts at increasing employee longevity.

Initial survey results and feedback indicated a negative attitude toward peer evaluation. After piloting the new peer form, attitudes towards the new evaluation process were assessed to determine whether the peer evaluation process will be implemented throughout the organization (see Appendix B). If the process is viewed positively by those who have participated in the pilot process, training will begin within other departments, and employee attitudes will continue to be a part of the decision in continuing the process or its elimination.

Results

Initial responses to the first survey were varied. Many indicated distrust and unwillingness to accept a new evaluation process, especially one that will involve employees rating their co-workers. Survey respondents felt that it would be a gripe session, extremely subjective, and a bad idea in general. Others, however, expressed the opinion that if carried out anonymously and with careful consideration of who will be the peer of each person, peer evaluation would be a nice tool to add to the current system.

Survey item responses were averaged in order to assess employee attitudes toward the peer evaluation process. Table 1 displays information gathered from the initial survey, and Table 2 shows attitudes from the survey distributed after the peer evaluation had been completed.

Table 1: (Avg. resp. 1= Comfortable   2= Indifferent   3= Uncomfortable)

Initial Question	Sub-questions	Average response	
How would you feel about rating the following persons:	Your Supervisor	1.3	Mean = 1.689
	Peer of less than 4 mo.	1.89	
	Peer with more experience	1.589	
	Peer who is a close friend	1.98	
Who of the following would you be most comfortable compiling your evaluations:	Human Resource Office	2.037	
	Your Supervisor	1.277	
	Any other Supervisor	2.426	

Do you feel the Peer Evaluation has potential to be:	Fair	17%
	Extremely Subjective	36%
	A Gripe Session	18%
	Improvement to company	29%
Should the peer process be combined with the current rating process?	Separate Tool	58%
	Combine Scores (peer's and supervisor's)	42%

Table 2: (Avg. Resp. 1= Very comfortable   2= Somewhat comfortable

3= Does not matter to me   4= Somewhat uncomfortable   5= Very uncomfortable)

Question	Average Response	
How did you feel about rating your peer?	2.2941	
What were your feelings having a co-worker rate your performance?	2.9411	Mean = 2.6
Are your feeling more at ease knowing that someone outside the organization will compile the scores?	2.4706	
What are your overall feeling about the new peer evaluation process?	2.7059	
Do you feel this process has been-	Fair-	23.5 %
	Extremely Subjective-	35.3 %
	A gripe Session-	17.7 %
	Improvement to company-	23.5 %

In Table 1, the average respondent score on question number 1 (how would

you feel about rating the following persons) across all rating categories had a mean

of 1.689 where a rating of 1 is comfortable and a rating of 2 is indifferent. Prior to

participating in peer evaluation, respondents felt more comfortable rating others in

the company. After completing the process, Table 2, respondents reported less

favorable attitudes across the four questions, mean 2.6, where a rating of 1 is very

comfortable, a rating of 2 is somewhat comfortable, and a rating of 3 means it does

not matter. The highest ratings on both surveys were on questions concerning a co-

worker or friend rating your performance. These high ratings are indicative of

uncomfortable feelings toward evaluations coming from anyone other than a direct

supervisor.

On survey number 2, 6.5 % more respondents rated the peer evaluation

process as fair than did in survey number 1. This change in percentage is reflected

in the question of whether or not the system is an improvement to the company. 29

% of survey 1 respondents feel it to be an improvement compared to 23.5 % in

survey 2. Post surveys reflected attitudes that the process would not be as

beneficial to the current process as did pre survey results. Peer evaluation is viewed

as more fair, but less valuable in post survey scores.

Surprisingly, respondent percentages of peer appraisal's subjectivity and

"gripe session" were almost unchanged. 36 % of respondents felt peer evaluation

would be extremely subjective in the first survey compared to 35.3 % in survey

number 2. 18 % of respondents in survey 1 compared to 17.7 % of respondents in

survey 2 had the attitude that peer evaluation would be a gripe session. It is

surprising that attitudes did not change in the categories between the pre and post

survey. I felt that after completion of peer evaluation, participants would be more

accepting of the process.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Strengths

The Peer Evaluation Process has enormous potential to allow employees a

voice in rating performance. It is very reasonable to think that there will be an

initial resistance to implementing any new procedure within an organization. That is

what was encountered in this study.

After the process has begun to be incorporated into the performance appraisal

process, however, I would expect to see less resistance. Prior to starting the peer

evaluation, employees were unsure of what to expect. Upon completion of the

procedure, they now are aware of what it entails. It would be interesting to see the

results of the post survey after each person has participated in the peer evaluation

for a one year period. Within that time frame, they would have had the opportunity

to provide peer evaluation feedback twice, and I think at that time there would be

much less resistance and more cooperation.

The Employers Resource Corporation was an added plus to the peer evaluation process. They were able to make the process completely anonymous by allowing participants to make their evaluations from home using either the internet or telephone. They assisted in creating the questionnaire, as well as compiling ratings. Because employees were able to call by phone, or access the internet to report their ratings, surveys showed that they were pleased with the privacy of rating each other. It was also efficacious having Employers Resource Corporation assign codes to each rater and ratee. This protected the security of participants calling or e-mailing scores for themselves or anyone who had not been assigned to them for rating purposes.

Another strength of the study was having an actual applied sample. Employees of the agency were involved from the beginning. They voiced their opinions concerning the process, and were then able to participate and experience how the peer evaluation actually works. More accurate feedback was supplied in that the employees actually work in the situation, they were not simply brought together in a field or laboratory setting.

Limitations

As with any study or new program implementation, there is always room for improvement due to limitations. One such limitation to the present study was that

the evaluation was not mandatory. The employees were volunteers in most cases.

There were a total of 15 evaluations out of 120 (30 employees times 4 evaluations

each) that were never completed. These individuals did not take the time to

complete all of their evaluations for various reasons. Some may have not been

invested in the process, some may have simply forgotten, or not understood how

many individuals they were to rate, others displayed resistance to changing the

current evaluation process by contacting the Human Resources Department and

expressing their concerns.

Some survey respondents (degreed staff) stated that they thought the idea of

peer evaluation was beneficial to the company. Other respondents (non-degreed

staff) also vocalized their opinion, but in the opposite direction stating that it was

not a good idea, and had potential to be extremely biased and subjective. After

hearing this feedback, it cautions one to appeal more to non-degreed staff for new

procedure implementation than degreed staff.

There were yet other peer evaluators that did not trust the process. Concerns

were that the process was not as secure as the company thought, and it is not a good

idea to have employees rating other employees. Feedback received aired concern

for staff relationships should information leak into "the wrong hands". It would be

detrimental for anyone to find out that a friend and co-worker does not think he or

she is a good employee. This made evident how important it is for the process to be

anonymous.

Future Direction

If the agency were to implement Peer Evaluation as a standing procedure,

staff education would be of utmost importance. From the current investigation,

confusion and lack of knowledge about the process were the key issues that could

have made the system's acceptance go smoother. In future efforts, staff education

should be the main focus. If staff are made fully aware of what peer evaluation is

and how it can be applied, more of those involved would be more likely to accept

and like the procedure.

Conclusion

The addition of the Peer Evaluation Process into the company's current

evaluation procedure would likely not result in an immediate positive reaction from

staff. Because the peer evaluation was not well received by employees who

participated, it would not be in the company's best interest to implement the

procedure as it currently stands.

Many of the participants did not fully understand what peer evaluation is and

how it can be utilized in the organization's appraisal process. Survey respondents

were uncomfortable rating their peers, and felt the procedure was extremely

subjective (35.3 %). Peer evaluation itself was not in question, but its

implementation was.

It is recommended that the company consider re-visiting peer evaluation from

a larger organizational perspective. Employees must be educated not only on what

peer evaluation is, but also how it will be executed, and what its implications will

be. If potential participants were to spend more time learning about the process,

they might receive it with less resistance. Participants should be trained on how to

evaluate performance, and how their peer counterparts will be chosen. Anonymity

must be stressed to the peer evaluation participants in order to assure trust in the

system. If peer evaluation participants are trained on the full scale peer evaluation

process, they may accept and appreciate the new system.

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Appendix A

Initial Peer Review Worksheet

(Prior to Supervisory Editing)

EMPLOYEE INFORMATION

Employee Name:
Job Title:
Department:
Reviewing Supervisor:
Peer Reviewer:
Review Period:
Date:

MESSAGE FOR THE REVIEWING SUPERVISOR:
Forward a copy of this form to each peer reviewer. After collecting completed worksheets, you may present them to the employee along with your feedback, or incorporate key comments from each worksheet into your appraisal. In either case it is recommended that you consult your HR department for advice on soliciting and communicating peer feedback.

WORKSHEET INSTRUCTIONS:
This worksheet is designed to help you provide feedback on the performance of a peer. You may use your responses from Parts One and Two to help complete the summary of Strengths/Improvements (Part Three). If you intend the feedback to be anonymous, delete Part One before returning the completed worksheet to the reviewing supervisor.

Part One: Questions to Consider

Use the following questions to stimulate thinking and focus your feedback.

A. What projects have you worked on together? Write down a few that you can refer to when considering strengths/improvements.

B. What day-to-day interactions do you have with the reviewee?

C. In what ways has the reviewee helped you meet your goals or mutual team goals?

D. If the reviewee left the organization tomorrow, what skills/knowledge would be missed the most?

Part Two: One-on-One Scorecard

Place an "x" in the appropriate boxes for relevant performance topics, indicating if the individual needs to improve in this area, meets expectations, or exceeds expectations. Include supporting comments as needed.

Adaptability:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
Is open to new ideas			
Takes on new work when needed to help the team			
Stays calm, easy to work with when under pressure			

Comments:

Communication:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Communicates clearly and directly			
2. Writing is clear, thorough, and easy to understand			
3. Shares information, ideas with others			
4. Has good listening skills			
5. Delivers good presentations, speaks well in front of groups			

Comments:

Customer Focus:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Takes ownership of customer satisfaction			
2. Sets realistic customer expectations			
3. Takes initiative to solve customer problems			
4. Seeks out customer input			
5. Responds to internal customers (co-workers)			

Comments:

Quality:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Is attentive to detail and accuracy			
2. Doesn't wait for others to fix quality problems			
3. Doesn't rely on others to double-check his/her work			
4. Looks for improvements continuously			

Comments:

Results Focus:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Focuses on key results, does not get distracted			
2. Keeps others focused on key results			
3. Provides leadership/motivation			

Comments:

Teamwork:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Works well in groups			
2. Helps resolve conflicts			
3. Encourages collaboration			
4. Facilitates meetings			
5. Works well with other departments			
6. Listens to and respects others' ideas			

Comments:

Work Environment:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Promotes mutual respect			
2. Keeps workplace clean and safe			
3. Supports safety programs.			

Comments:

Personal Organization:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Keeps information organized and accessible			
2. Responds quickly to information requests			

Comments:

Planning:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Coordinates plans with others			
2. Considers co-workers schedules, commitments when planning			

Comments:

Problem Solving:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Takes personal responsibility for solving problems			
2. Generates alternative solutions			
3. Takes an active role in solving team problems			

Comments:

Productivity:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Manages a fair workload			
2. Volunteers for additional work			
3. Handles information flow			

Comments:

Project Management:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Establishes project goals and milestones			
2. Defines project members' roles and responsibilities			
3. Communicates changes to the project team			

Comments:

Interpersonal Skills:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Solicits performance feedback, handles constructive criticism			
2. Builds strong relationships			
3. Is flexible/open-minded			

Comments:

Job Knowledge:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Has necessary job knowledge			
2. Has necessary technical skills			
3. Keeps job knowledge current, looks for learning opportunities			

Comments:

Leadership:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Can be persuasive and convincing			
2. Can motivate, inspire peers			
3. Can both lead and let others lead			

Comments:

Meeting Management:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Develops a meeting agenda			
2. Sets clear goals for meetings			
3. Encourages and balances input.			

Comments:

Decision Making:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Makes logical, systematic decisions			
2. Is biased toward decisive action			
3. Builds consensus for decisions when possible			
4. Can make difficult/unpopular decisions			
5. Considers impact of decisions on others			

Comments:

Dependability:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Meets commitments to co-workers			
2. Accepts accountability for success and failure			

Comments:

Initiative:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Takes independent action			
2. Seeks out new responsibilities, volunteers for team projects			
3. Takes initiative to improve own performance			

Comments:

Innovation:	Improve	Meets	Exceeds
1. Generates new ideas			
2. Challenges the status quo			
3. Supports change			
4. Encourages, supports other's ideas			

Comments:

Part 3 Strengths/Improvements

List 3-7 strengths and 3-7 potential areas for improvement. You can use your answers from Steps One and Two above to focus your list. To save time you may use short phrases to summarize issues (e.g. "great resource with client WB"), supporting these comments with specific examples whenever possible (e.g. "really helped me on the ABC project").

1. Strengths — Most valuable skills, knowledge, or results achieved.
      Examples:
          — takes the lead in team meetings, pushes the group through indecision
          — strong technical knowledge, also good about sharing knowledge

2. Improvements — Skills, knowledge, or results to work on.

      Examples:
          — could be less critical, more supportive of other people's ideas
          — could communicate better/more frequently with co-workers

Appendix B

(Post attitude survey)

Peer Evaluation Response Survey

Please take a few moments to give us your honest opinion on the peer evaluation procedure.

Using the following scale, please answer questions 1-4.

        1- Very comfortable

        2- Somewhat comfortable

        3- Does not matter to me

        4- Somewhat uncomfortable

        5- Very uncomfortable

① How did you feel about rating your peer/peers?   _____

② What were your feelings concerning a co-worker rating your performance?   _____

③ Are your feelings more at ease knowing that a person outside the organization will be

     compiling the scores?   _____

④ What are your overall feelings about the new peer evaluation process?   _____

⑤ Do you feel this process has been (please circle only one)

     Fair - Extremely Subjective - A gripe session - Improvement to old system

⑥ Now that you have participated in the new peer evaluation process, please use the space

     below to supply us with any additional comments you may have: