

**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**

**How Are We Performing?
An Investigation Into the Necessity and Usefulness of Personnel
Evaluations in the Management of Law Enforcement Personnel**

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ABSTRACT

Today's law enforcement agency, which includes the individual officers, administrators and the actual governmental entity which employs them, is constantly striving for professionalism. This struggle toward professionalism requires careful development of personnel and good stewardship of the resources available during an era of dwindling revenue. The topic and purpose of this research paper is to investigate the usefulness or necessity of personnel performance evaluations in the management and development of law enforcement personnel. The issue being addressed is whether the law enforcement agencies and officers will benefit from a personnel performance evaluation system.

The methodology used in this research is a review of literature available on the subject of personnel evaluations, an internal survey of the Texarkana, Texas Police Department, and an external survey of law enforcement agencies from across the State of Texas.

The results of the research indicate that personnel performance evaluations are absolutely vital for making sound decisions in the management of today's professional law enforcement agency.

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INTRODUCTION

Today's law enforcement agencies find themselves in a pursuit of professionalism that is demanded by the public they serve. Agencies also find themselves in an environment where increasing service demands and shrinking budgets force them to make more efficient use of their resources. This combination of factors requires a careful development of their officers, who represent a considerable investment of time, money and effort.

Recruit officers are constantly evaluated against a set of minimum standards to determine their progress during the training program. The recruit officers are provided with regular feedback on how their performance measures up in relation to the minimum standards. The function of these regular performance evaluations highlights the recruit's significant strengths and deficiencies. This evaluation process enables the recruit officer to improve in areas where their performance does not meet the minimum standards, as well as maintaining their areas of proficiency. Recruit officers who are unable to meet the minimum standards are provided with either remedial training or are removed from the training program. This process prevents placing the recruit officer in a job for which they are ill-suited and which they will never perform at an acceptable level of proficiency. This process also prevents the law enforcement agency's wasting of scarce training resources. Unfortunately, this evaluation process often ceases at the end of the recruit officer's probationary period.

This evaluation process should continue. It could be beneficial to officers and agencies who are struggling toward professionalism and the efficient use of the resources with which they are entrusted. Providing the officer with clear expectations of

performance and feedback, as to whether they are meeting those expectations, would provide the officer who is striving for professionalism the tools for self-improvement. Law enforcement agencies would also be able to assess the training needs of their officers and apply available resources where they would be most effectively used.

The purpose of this research project is to determine the necessity and usefulness of employee performance evaluations in the management of law enforcement personnel. More specifically, to address the question: Are performance evaluations of benefit to officers and the agencies they work for? The methods of inquiry to be used in this project will include a review of literature available on this subject, an internal survey of the author's department as well as surveys of other law enforcement agencies across the State of Texas. The anticipated outcome of this research project is that law enforcement officers and agencies in Texas would find performance evaluations valuable when identifying officer's strengths and deficiencies along with their training needs.

The benefits or implications of this research include officers receiving clear expectations of job performance and regular feedback on how their performance matches expectations, which would enable them to improve their efforts in their striving for professionalism. Also, agencies could identify an effective tool for managing their personnel and allocating resources in an era of declining budgetary resources. Communities would also benefit from more professional and effective law enforcement officers and agencies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When a discussion of employee performance evaluations is begun, there are usually at least three questions that are debated. Why should employee performance be measured? For what purpose will the performance evaluations be used? What items or activities are to be measured? For each one of the questions posed above, there are numerous opinions, within both the academic and law enforcement communities, as to the proper answer to each question.

Why should we measure employee performance? According to Mastrofski and Wadman (1991) there are three general categories and specifics within each category. Category one is Administration, which includes decisions about promotion, demotion, reward, training needs, salary, job assignment, retention and termination. Category two is Guidance and Counseling, which includes providing performance feedback to employees, assistance in career planning and improving employee motivation. Category three is Research, which includes validation of employee selection and screening procedures as well as training evaluations. Those uses are echoed by Landy (1977) where evaluating training effectiveness and assisting employees in achieving personal and organizational goals are listed as reasons for employee evaluation systems. Performance evaluations can also be useful in identifying individuals whose performance and abilities would make them attractive candidates for specialized units such as investigations, traffic, planning and so forth (Hale, 1981). Performance evaluations should monitor an officer's knowledge, skills and attitudes in relation to their specific job and should simultaneously be a way for officers to demonstrate their competency. Organizations may also use these evaluations to reinforce their

department's philosophy or mission statement and provide the officer feedback on how his performance is enhancing the department's pursuit of its goals (Oettmeier and Kenney , 2001).

A performance appraisal or evaluation may be useful in identifying areas of weakness that limit the employee's effectiveness. Both the employer and employee benefit when the employee's weaknesses are identified and a concerted effort is made to improve the areas where performance has been deficient. Employees profit by increased job satisfaction and security. Employers benefit because improving a less effective employee is much less costly and time-consuming than recruiting and training a new employee. The information gleaned from a performance appraisal will also assist the employee, as well as the employer, in determining training needs that may enable the employee to obtain a more challenging position within the organization. Employees who are identified as exceptional performers could be provided with specialized training that would assist the employee in developing into a better candidate for promotion (Melnicoe & Mennig, 1978).

Personnel evaluations can also be useful to the organization as a means of providing governing bodies information about the organization's accountability in the management of resources in an era when resources are shrinking (Oettmeier & Wycoff, 1999). Law enforcement executives often have to provide a continually increasing level of service to a public which will not tolerate a reduction in services. Performance evaluations will allow the law enforcement executive to show that they are making good use of the personnel resources they have. When law enforcement executives can show that they are exercising good stewardship of the funds they have been allotted, it is

easier to ask for budgetary increases when necessary and to justify those budgets to policy makers (Trojanowicz and Bucqueroux, 1992).

The second question addresses the uses that departments may find for performance evaluations. What are the legitimate uses for performance evaluations? Information needed for personnel research, input for staffing decisions and performance feedback to employees are general purposes which may assist agencies in creating healthy organizations (Evans, 2003). Another important use for an evaluation system is to determine if officers are performing in a manner that advances the mission of the agency as well as how the officers' performance matches their job description (Trojanowicz, 1998). A performance evaluation, done honestly and objectively, will contain information that could serve as a way to improve employee performance (Hilgenfeldt, 2004). Officers and their agencies are best served when the officer's competency is developed to its fullest and the officer is allowed to become more innovative, responsive and productive in their job performance (Oettmeier and Kenney, 2001). In some agencies, primarily those who are not civil service agencies, performance evaluations are used in determining who may be eligible for promotion or transfer (Smith, 1997).

The last question to be explored is how to determine what is measured. If all of the reasons listed above are taken into consideration, what activities should be measured? To be effective in accomplishing the purposes that an agency determines that their evaluation system is to be used for, the evaluation system should be carefully thought out. The performance standards should reflect what the agency values and how well the employee's performance compares to these standards. These standards

should not be vague, but must be clear and job-related. The standards should also be specific and measurable. The standards should also measure quality of work, not just quantity (Hale, 1981). The standards should be developed to accurately reflect the work product of a specific position and should also result from job analysis and match the current job description of the employee being evaluated (Hilgenfeldt,2004). Employees have a legal right to know what is expected of them and their jobs, thus the standards of performance must be clearly defined.

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this research project or the question to be answered is whether there is any necessity or usefulness in performance evaluations in the management of law enforcement personnel and is there any real benefit to the officers or agencies involved. It is the author's hypothesis that both officers and their agencies would benefit from a performance evaluation system that provides clear expectations of performance and feedback as to whether the officer is meeting those expectations.

There will be two measurement instruments used in this project. The first instrument will be an internal survey of the Texarkana, Texas Police Department. The second instrument will be an external survey of other law enforcement agencies in the State of Texas. The internal survey instrument was delivered to forty officers who were assigned to the Patrol Division of the Texarkana, Texas Police Department. The internal survey instrument was hand-delivered to each of the officer's departmental mailboxes, along with a cover sheet explaining what the information would be used for and who would have access to the information. Approximately seventy percent of the survey instruments were returned having been completed.

The external survey instrument was delivered in two methods, e-mail and personal delivery. The second survey instrument, the external survey, was sent out as an e-mail to law enforcement contacts of the author. The external survey was sent out, via e-mail, to twenty-six individuals in twenty-five separate agencies. Forty-two percent of those survey instruments were returned having been completed. A second series of the external survey instrument was hand-delivered to participants in the author's LEMIT Module II class. The external survey instrument was delivered to eleven individuals and all were returned having been completed. With the return of those external survey instruments, the author was able to obtain information on the status of personnel evaluation systems from twenty-one separate law enforcement agencies from across the State of Texas.

The information obtained from the internal and external survey instruments will be analyzed by compiling a list of all responses to each specific question. The survey instruments will be examined for areas of agreement, as well as areas of concern. The information obtained from the external survey will be analyzed to determine how other agencies carry out their evaluation process and to what purpose it is used. The information obtained from the internal survey will be used in attempt to gain some sort of consensus as to what should be measured in an evaluation process. The information gathered will also identify officers' concerns in relation to the actual or perceived inequalities that are often associated with employee performance evaluations.

FINDINGS

The two survey instruments were analyzed to determine the current opinion on the usefulness of personnel evaluations in the Texarkana, Texas Police Department and other law enforcement agencies across the State of Texas.

Within the Texarkana, Texas Police Department, approximately seventy percent of the survey instruments were returned having been completed. The survey instrument posed four questions to the officers surveyed as to the following: 1-feedback on job performance, 2-the importance of that feedback, and, 3-as well as any benefit or usefulness of a performance evaluation system. Officers were then asked what performance areas should be measured and what concerns the officers had with a personnel performance evaluation system.

Fifty-three percent of the officers stated that they received useful feedback from their immediate supervisor as to their job performance, with forty-seven percent advising that they did not. Seventy-eight percent of the officers stated that feedback on their job performance is important to them and twenty-two percent advising that it was not important. Sixty percent of the officers stated that a performance evaluation system would be of benefit to them, with forty percent advising they felt that there would be no benefit. Sixty percent of the officers stated that they would welcome a performance evaluation system in the department, with forty percent advising that they were opposed to a performance evaluation system.

The opinions on what items should be measured were widely varied and there will be no attempt to list them all. Some of the common items were job knowledge,

productivity, decision-making ability, attitude toward the job and the public, communication skills and quality of work product.

The external survey instrument asked if the departments used personnel evaluations and if so, to what purpose. Questions about employee satisfaction with the system and recurrent complaints about the evaluations were also posed. The responding agencies were also questioned as to the frequency of evaluations, the utility of the evaluations and whether they would recommend the use of personnel evaluations to other departments.

The external survey instrument revealed that approximately eighty-nine percent of the departments that responded currently used some form of personnel evaluation. Some of the common uses listed were: performance improvement, transfers, promotions, incentive or merit pay raises, disciplinary procedures as well as giving employees feedback on how their job performance matched department expectations. The respondents were equally divided on employee satisfaction with the current evaluation system as approximately fifty percent were satisfied and the other fifty percent not satisfied. There was one survey instrument returned that stated that the department employees did not seem to care one way or another so the question was answered, yes and no. The common complaints with the current systems were equality, fairness, relevance and objectivity. The majority of the respondents advised that their departments did evaluations annually, with a few doing six-month reviews. The overwhelming majority of respondents stated that evaluations are a useful tool in managing their employees' job performance and also recommended that other departments use personnel performance evaluations.

The respondents listed numerous items that needed to be measured in a performance evaluation system. Some of the common items were job knowledge, quality and quantity of work, reliability/dependability, communications skills, care and usage of agency resources, self-initiated activity, attitude toward public and co-workers, decision-making, job knowledge, etc. The lists vary depending on what each agency values in their mission and their employees' performance.

CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this research project, or the question to be answered, is whether there is any necessity or usefulness in performance evaluations in the management of law enforcement personnel and is there any benefit to the officers and agencies involved. It is the author's hypothesis that both the officers and agencies involved would benefit from a performance evaluation system that provides clear expectations of performance and feedback as to whether the officer is meeting those expectations.

A review of the literature on the subject revealed an almost universal agreement on the subject of personnel evaluations. None of the sources reviewed had a negative view of personnel evaluations. All the authors were of the opinion that a personnel evaluation system is a necessity in the management of law enforcement personnel. Experts in the field of employee management stated that performance evaluations were vital in administrative decisions such as promotions, demotions and job assignments. The evaluations were critical in the area of budget justification in eras of shrinking resources. Some of the specific uses for employee evaluations in research were validation of employee screening processes, evaluations of training programs and selection processes for specialized units within the agency. Another area where

employee evaluation systems are important is the area of employee development. Providing employees with feedback on their performance can assist them in identifying areas where they may need training and allow them to improve their knowledge, skills and attitudes so that they may become better employees and increase their promotional attractiveness.

In deciding what to measure, agencies must decide what they value, then do a detailed analysis of job descriptions and the tasks that are specific to different positions. Once the job analysis is done, the agency must set clear, job-related performance standards that are specific and measurable and communicate them to the employees.

The internal survey carried out within the Texarkana, Texas Police Department (author's employing agency) indicated that performance feedback is important to the officers. The officers were almost equally divided on the issues of the need for an evaluation system within the agency and whether they would welcome an evaluation system, and their concerns on the objectivity and usefulness of an evaluation system.

The external survey of law enforcement agencies from across the State of Texas indicated that numerous agencies in Texas carry out regular performance evaluations of their employees and feel that a performance evaluation system is an integral part of a successful employee management system. The types of activities to be measured were similar between the internal and external survey respondents.

Based on the review of the available literature on the subject of employee personnel evaluations and the results of the internal and external surveys, it is the author's conclusion that an employee evaluation system should be based on the values of the agency, must be job-specific according to that position's job description and must

have clearly articulated job standards. The standards must be specific and measurable. If the evaluation system can meet these standards and can be done in a reasonably objective manner, it is the author's opinion that the evaluation system can be an important and valuable tool in the management of today's professional law enforcement agencies and the author is convinced that the data supports the hypothesis.

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