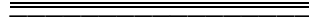


**The Bill Blackwood  
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**Making Employee Evaluations a Motivational Tool**



**A Leadership White Paper  
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
Required for Graduation from the  
Leadership Command College**



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## **ABSTRACT**

Employee evaluations have been deemed a necessity in many organizations. The purpose of these evaluations varies from organization to organization but each has a specific goal in mind. The organization that does not meet its goal in regards to employee evaluations is missing the opportunity to use the process to improve middle management, motivate employees and collect data that is valuable in assigning and promoting employees. The lack of attention to this process represents a lost opportunity for both the organization and its employees.

Evaluations are an important part of leading and managing an organization in that they can serve to gather data from and give feedback to employees. Using a combination of the various evaluation techniques that best suit the individual organization, training the raters and holding the supervisors responsible for conducting the rating process accountable are important considerations. While it presents a challenge for those assigned the task of rating subordinates, if that challenge is met and overcome the reward can be improved efficiency and morale.

Through the examination of various texts and academic presentations, this paper proposes that the evaluation process can become an exchange of information, ideas, and vision between management and employees. This exchange can reduce frustration, improve morale, and prevent organizations from becoming stagnant. The opportunity to use evaluations in such a manner lies with the upper management of each organization and requires the cooperation of the majority of employees.

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## INTRODUCTION

The process of evaluating employee performance has been deemed as necessary by most organizations. The purpose of these processes has varied over time and from manager to manager. Some organizations have used them as a way to justify the termination of an employee and protect the organization from lawsuits. Other organizations have attempted to make the evaluation process a positive thing that is helpful to the employee and the organization alike.

In Whisenand and Rush (1988), three of the most common methods of employee evaluations were examined. The global rating scale, the performance domain rating scale, and the behaviorally anchored rating scale are the most common methods. Each method has good and bad points.

The global rating scale consists of a small number of job functions or tasks being identified in broad terms. These tasks are then rated in a vague or "global" manner. This method is subject to a number of errors that will be covered later. This method was, for years, the most common in law enforcement and is still used by some agencies.

The performance domain rating scale attempts to establish what the employee's responsibilities are within their respective assignments by compiling a list of relevant job tasks. The employee is then rated on the basis of whether or not they have accomplished these job tasks or to what degree they have accomplished the tasks. This method elicits a narrative from the rater or supervisor conducting the evaluation in order to explain the basis of the rating received by the employee.

The behaviorally anchored rating scale relies on behavioral observations of the employee to be evaluated over a significant period of time. The observed behavior is then rated positively or negatively based on the effect that behavior has on the organizations desired goals. This method appears to take more effort on the part of the rater than the other methods.

In Orrick (2008), another evaluation method is put forward, the 360-degree evaluation. This method entails the identification of job tasks pertinent to the employee's position and then having these tasks rated by the employee as well as multiple other raters. The raters may be supervisors, subordinates, or peers. This method is intended to give the employee being rated a better idea of how they are perceived by those around them compared to their own self-evaluation. The methods mentioned here are not a complete list of all available styles or systems of employee evaluation; however, it does cover those most commonly used.

The opportunity to use the evaluation process to accomplish a positive outcome with employee morale and conduct should not be neglected. It is the responsibility of the leadership of every organization to use all the available tools at their disposal to build up members of the organization to their full potential. A supervisor cannot accomplish the goals of their organization without the assistance of their employees. The better the employee performs the greater the probability that the organizations goals will be met. If morale is low, then employees are less likely to be motivated to do their jobs and productivity will suffer. It is the responsibility of organizational leaders to create an evaluation process that fosters an atmosphere of cooperation and mentoring

without having a negative stigma attached to it or allowing the process to be undermined by mid-management or employees.

## **POSITION**

Evaluations should be taken as a serious process by supervisors and employees alike. Invalid evaluation systems can be a hindrance to efficiency: “An invalid and unreliable evaluation system very easily leads to low employee morale, motivation and job satisfaction, which can severely limit the operational effectiveness of the organization” (Roberg, 1979, p. 229). If the leadership of an organization allows the evaluation process to become discounted or meaningless, this is a sign that they are not taking this opportunity seriously. Employees will inevitably identify weakness in a management team before it is evident to the management team itself. A major source of the disenchantment among employees is consistently listed by authors on the subject as being poor supervision and a lack of communication and understanding of the standards and expectations their organization has of them. The supervisor, especially the front line supervisor, should make every effort to validate the process: “Poor supervisory practices account for a large share of the dissatisfaction and negative feelings of employees” (Iannone, 1994, p. 147). Iannone also stated that employee misunderstanding of policies and goals is mostly a breakdown in communication between supervision and employees.

The ability to communicate is essential for any supervisor or leader to ensure that those who are part of the team know what is expected of them and have an understanding of the team goals. It is the responsibility of the top official of an organization to make sure that those directly below themselves on a chain of command

truly understand the goals set for the organization. This top official must in turn see that this understanding is effectively transferred down that chain of command to the rank and file. Communication is a core competency: "Supervising is basically a communication process" (Iannone, 1994, p.93). Supervisors should not be allowed to conduct evaluations as a meaningless task. The supervisors should be rated on their ability to rate their subordinates and assist them to improve. A supervisor can very quickly transfer their attitude, either positive or negative, to their subordinates. The importance of the first line supervisor cannot be over emphasized: "First line and middle managers are the secret to maintaining a high retention environment. The relationship employees have with their immediate supervisor is one of the most significant internal factors for engaging and retaining officers" (Orrick, 2008, p.172). If a supervisor, at any level, does a poor job of evaluating their subordinates, they are failing in one of their most important tasks.

Poor or adversarial relations between supervisors and employees are counterproductive to an organization. Supervisors must hold themselves accountable to the same or higher standards than those that have been set for their subordinates. Senior police leaders must take it upon themselves to ensure that a clear goal has been set and that the material is present for the organization to accomplish this goal (Orrick, 2008). One such goal should be the evaluation process.

Regardless of which evaluation system is selected by an agency, the senior leadership of that agency must maintain a level of consistency in how that system is employed. This can best be accomplished by ensuring that every supervisor tasked with performing evaluations is in turn rated upon their ability to rate others. Selecting

the right person for the job is a must: "The job of performance evaluator is an extremely important one. Employers must take great care to select the right person for the job and give him or her the training, which is necessary to do that job effectively" (Baxter & Siniscalco, 1983, p.75). The evaluation process should be monitored from the highest possible level within the organization to ensure that the process remains valid. The process should not be completed with incorrect information or in a careless manner. Evaluations need to be audited periodically in order to ensure that they are not becoming a rubber stamp affair, they should show results from outstanding to unacceptable. If an audit does not show a variance in results, then there is most likely a problem with the process and the process and those conducting it should be reviewed (Baxter & Siniscalco, 1983).

Evaluations should be used as a tool to reduce negative behavior or trends. This should be accomplished by using the evaluation process to implement early intervention, to better inform employees of what behavior is expected of them and as an opportunity to motivate and mentor the employees. The perception of an individual is in a sense that individual's reality (Sheehan & Cordner, 1979). The person assigned to rate others must take into consideration what that person's perceptions of the process might be and attempt to bring that perception around to a positive direction. Attaining this positive perception is the first and largest step in having a positive and beneficial evaluation process. Training the raters in the evaluation process is essential to creating this perception of fairness and care that employees can rely upon.

The exact system or process that is selected by an agency is less important than how it is implemented. If a mediocre process is implemented in a positive way it will



have better results than a good system that is implemented in a lazy or belligerent manner. A good process implemented fairly by management and received positively by employees is the goal.

According to Whisenand and Rush (1988), most agencies do not train the supervisors who are responsible for completing evaluations. This is a poor practice, which should not be continued. Raters must be trained and provided with the tools they need to complete their task. The most important tool they can be provided with is a good process tailored to fit their agency and specific units. This process should include a rating manual that contains definitions of the categories to be rated and an explanation of the criteria used to make those ratings. The rater should be trained on how to use that process and encouraged to implement it in a manner that is consistent and impartial.

Once a process has been put in place and promoted as a positive tool to the employees, the supervisors within the organization can use this process to help their subordinates to grow and improve themselves. Implementation of a mentoring program for employees who have little experience is advisable. Providing these “rookies” with a mentor will help to influence them in the direction that the organization finds desirable. Without this the new employee may acquire an unofficial mentor who imparts undesirable views and habits that are not to the effected employee’s or the agencies benefit (Orrick, 2008). Employees with any length of service could be given additional training to correct identified deficiencies. Those who are burned out at their current assignment may be considered for a different assignment within the organization.

Unfortunately, this process may identify some employees who are beyond any assistance from management in correcting their deficiencies or problems. These individuals must necessarily be pruned from the organization for the good of both parties. In the absence of criminal acts or other intolerable behavior this should be as a last resort after the individual has been given ample opportunity to acclimate to the organization.

A major part of the process should be the immediate supervisor working cooperatively with the employee to set individual goals for their career growth. This should not be a set of goals imposed upon the employee by an authoritarian boss, but instead goals that the employee can “buy into”. The goals must be those that interest the employee as well as benefit the organization or they will be perceived negatively.

(Whisenand & Rush, 1993)

## **COUNTER POSITION**

Employees are seldom satisfied with the evaluation process due to its subjective nature. Evaluations are subject to challenge by employees and their support groups such as unions. The support groups will support the employee regardless of the rational basis for any criticism. The evaluation process is as unpopular with the supervisors conducting them as it is with the employees undergoing them. The supervisors are often ignorant of the spirit behind the process and conduct the rating in a haphazard manner (Swanson, Territo, & Taylor, 2005, p.394). The errors made in the rating process leads to employee dissatisfaction. It is possible for unions to cause a divide between the lower ranks and those in upper management. This can have a negative impact on professionalism in a police organization, especially when a union

supports an employee over a legitimate disciplinary action by management (Swanson, Territo & Taylor, 2005)

Evaluations are only a tool to be used for defending the organization in case the termination or discipline of an employee is necessary. In *Manager's Guide to Lawful Terminations* (Baxter & Siniscalco, 1983) made this point "Consider, for example, the difficulty which an employer will have convincing a jury that the employee was terminated for poor performance if his or her personnel file contains twenty years of consistently satisfactory performance appraisals" (p.73). The evaluation process can easily become the boss's way of building a record for termination. From the same text, "There are a number of practical steps which employers can take to insure that the record made by their performance appraisal system will support them (and not the plaintiff) in wrongful termination litigation" (Baxter & Siniscalco, 1983, p 74).

The chance for an employee to self-evaluate, or to make comments during the process, is just a way to document that the employee acknowledges their faults. The lack of contrary comment by the employee will validate the negative comments entered into the record by the rating supervisor. A "chronicle of events" should be kept on each employee and should contain information on unacceptable performance or behavior (Baxter & Siniscalco, 1983). Porter (2009) stated in a lecture that "The manager's first responsibility is to protect their agency from civil liability". If this is the manager's first responsibility, it could lead to bad practices that are interpreted by employees as being prejudicial to them.

The idea that employees will automatically reject the evaluation process as something that is going to be used against them reflects upon the management team.

A management team must gain the trust of the employees working with them and prove to them that the process is meant to assist them as opposed to harming them. If the management team is of poor quality then the criticism presented here may be valid, but a competent management team can overcome these negative conceptions. A wise man said, "You will get more work out of a man who believes he is working with you than you will out of a man who knows he is working for you" (T.L. Ray, personal communication, 1984). Supervisors at every level should be prompted to take interest in the evaluation process: "Systematic evaluations encourage supervisors to take a personal interest in the officers under their command. Within this context, appraisals can have a humanizing effect on supervisors by holding commanders responsible for the performance of subordinates" (Swanson, Territo, & Taylor, 2005, p. 394).

Upper management must ensure that supervisors throughout the entire chain of command fully understand their responsibility within the evaluation process. Supervisors must be trained to properly rate and evaluate their subordinates and in turn be held accountable for that task. Supervisors who show no aptitude for evaluation or who refuse to put forth the effort to accomplish this task must not be allowed to poison the process. Those who are not making the grade should be removed from the process if this is possible.

According to Swanson, Territo, and Taylor (2005), "management should monitor the performance appraisals process by cross comparing the ratings of various raters" (p. 394). If an officer who is productive in arrests, citations, convictions or another area receives a lower score than a less productive officer, the rater should be required to explain the reason for the score that was awarded. If the person keeping score knows

that someone is watching the process from above them, they should be more likely to stay consistent and deliver procedural justice in the process.

Management must ensure that supervisors who are tasked with rating subordinates are properly trained to conduct that rating or evaluation. It is critical, not only, that raters are properly trained, but that they are in turn evaluated on their willingness and ability to perform this task. (Whisenand & Rush, 1988 p. 204). If the job of evaluation is conducted in a valid and fair manner, the majority of employees will trust the process.

Although some employee organizations (unions) may support their members even when they are clearly in the wrong, the grievance and arbitration process is in common use to settle these matters. It is human nature to support one's peers when possible and management should not take this as a personal matter. Fairness or justice is what employees are really expecting in the work place and while things may not turn out the way an employee might have wanted they can better accept that if they know they were treated justly. Umphress (2009) stated during a lecture that "If you are not pleased with your outcome then procedural and interactional justice will ameliorate the negative impact of a bad outcome."

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The primary purpose of an evaluation process should be to gather information that can be used to benefit the employee and the organization. The process is an opportunity to fairly and equitably offer both praise and constructive criticism to the employee being evaluated while fostering employee growth. When employees realize that the process is in place to assist them and to cooperate in their career development,

they can accept it without a negative stigma being attached to its recommendations. Supervisors must take this process as an opportunity to communicate with their subordinates and act as a facilitator and mentor to assist those subordinates in their career growth.

Those counter points presented here are based primarily on negative attitudes and perceptions, both those of employees and managers. The challenge for a leader is to foster a spirit of cooperation at every turn and communicate to those around them not only the final destination but also the wisdom of the path that has been chosen. The evaluation process is just one tool that can be used towards that end.

If the police profession does not continually perform a self-diagnostic of its performance and efficiency, then it will become stagnant. That diagnostic starts with the individual officers and carries over to the agencies performance. By ensuring that the members of this profession are conscious of their potential and are consistently challenging that potential to meet higher standards, law enforcement can avoid stagnation and thereby better serve the public.

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