

The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas

Performance Evaluation Systems:
Are Law Enforcement Organizations Doing Their Part?

An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
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Leadership Command College

by
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Abstract

This research is based on the question; Are law enforcement agencies doing their part when it comes to performance evaluations. The researcher had two hypotheses. First, supervisors were not receiving proper training to conduct fair and accurate evaluations. Secondly, employees being evaluated could potentially have their pay and assignments affected by improper evaluations.

The author's research defined performance evaluations as a tool for measuring an employees past performance against an established standard. They are useful in that they identify important performance areas and set the stage for future development. The immediate supervisor on a set schedule ranging from quarterly to annually will do them. The results of performance evaluations were often used in determining if an employee received a transfer or pay raise.

Research showed that of the thirty agencies surveyed a large majority (twenty three or 77%) of them conducted performance evaluations on their employee. The greatest fault of the performance evaluation process showed to be the lack of training given to people who perform them. The survey revealed that of the twenty-three agencies who perform performance evaluations twenty-one or 91 % received eight hours or less of training on how to properly perform evaluations.

This research clearly indicates that law enforcement agencies are not doing their part when it comes to performance evaluations. The researcher found many benefits in the use of performance evaluations as he conducted his research, however is clear that without proper training those benefits cannot be received.

INTRODUCTION

It was approximately three years ago, when Alex Longoria, the Chief of Police in McAllen (TX.) first mentioned the possibility of implementing a performance evaluation system. The author's limited exposure in performance evaluations to this point occurred during military service from 1986 to 1990. As a young soldier, the author's sergeant would call every so often and, in a matter of minutes, the performance evaluation was done. The process, purpose or worth of the evaluation was never explained. As Chief Longoria continued, the author remembered hoping that law enforcement performance evaluations would be superior to those done in the military. Unfortunately however, current trends in law enforcement performance evaluations may indicate this may not be the case.

A growing number of law enforcement agencies throughout the United States are currently using some form of employee performance evaluation and, according to Bennett (1996), performance evaluations help law enforcement managers measure past performance, identify important performance areas and set the stage for future development. These seem to be very worthwhile objectives and a solid foundation for initiating an employee performance evaluation.

The author's belief however, is that due to inadequate training the promise made by performance evaluations is actually much greater than the product. The author poses this question: Are law enforcement organizations doing their part when it comes to performance evaluations? The author has two hypotheses dealing with performance evaluations:

1: Law enforcement supervisors are not receiving proper training to conduct performance evaluations.

2: Law enforcement officers are having their careers negatively impacted by performance evaluations.

If supervisors and/or organizations are only half-heartedly committed to the performance evaluation process, does this come at the expense of the officers and their career development? Supervisors must know that the performance evaluation process is challenging and must be approached with caution (Huckabee, 1992). There are some potentially damaging effects of inaccurate performance evaluations. As stated by Kerr (1996), if evaluations are not done in an accurate, uniform and efficient way they can be a negative catalyst and become detrimental to the employee's performance.

According to O'Leary (1989) performance evaluations have some very distinct problems: ratings can be subjective, lack job relatedness, and contain rater inconsistencies, favoritism, and potential discrimination. These problems result from a lack of training for supervisors; therefore a better question may be "Are law enforcement organizations doing their part by properly training supervisors to conduct performance evaluations? The next issue as previously mentioned is "Law enforcement officers are having their careers impacted by performance evaluations, conducted by untrained supervisors"? Are agencies merely going through the motions in order to keep up with current trends? If so the author reminds readers of Dr. Angelo DeNisi's quote when he states, "If your not doing a good job at appraisals don't do them at all!" (April 3, 2001 personal communication). In an attempt to answer these questions I will conduct a survey of different agencies and the results will be incorporated into this research.

Organizations have placed increased importance on starting a performance evaluation process as well as ensuring evaluations are completed on a regular basis. However, starting and maintaining a performance evaluation schedule is but a small part of the performance evaluation process. The purpose of this research is two fold and will be based on a survey and related readings. First is that organizations are not properly training their supervisors to conducting performance evaluations. Secondly those same organizations are using the results of performance evaluations to determine pay increases, transfers, training and/or assignments for law enforcement officers. Additionally, if this research shows that organizations have implemented a process but failed to follow through with proper training, the hope is that agencies will recognize the potential for damaging effects to both the organization and the officer and take action to correct it.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It is not uncommon for the mention of performance evaluations to tighten nerves and clench teeth, regardless if one is the evaluator or the person being evaluated. These feelings may come from basic parental teaching of “not judging others.” It may also be possible that people feel uncomfortable with performance evaluations because they aren’t familiar with them, don’t understand them, or simply had a bad experience with them. As we review the literature it is important to remember what Lester (1993) says in that there are good and bad ways of carrying out appraisals.

As the review of literature is conducted the intent will be to broaden understanding by discussing the what, why, how and when of evaluations. So what are performance evaluations, according to Webster (2001)? The term evaluate means to determine the significance, worth, or condition of; usually by careful appraisal and study.

It is also important to clarify that appraisal and evaluation, which are synonyms, both refer to measuring on-the-job performance (Bennett 1996). Buenik (1993) states that a performance evaluation is the process of comparing an individual's past performance with the established standards so that organizational effectiveness can be improved and individual potential can be developed.

Another important area of performance evaluations is why are they done.

Huckabee (1992) states the answer appears to be two fold:

1. Provide the officer with written record of performance at a given time, (s)he knows his or her strengths and weaknesses.
2. A management tool; provides effective personnel information and helps establish a system for making informed, objective decisions.

Bennett (1996) reaffirms this answer and further adds that the primary purpose of a performance evaluation process is to provide supervisors with a job related tool for:

- Evaluating subordinate performance on a formal, periodic basis.
- Promoting common understanding of individual needs, work objectives and standards of acceptable performance.
- Providing subordinates with feedback as to how well the supervisor feels they are meeting expectations.
- Suggesting the specific courses of action the subordinate can take in order to meet or exceed expectations.
- Providing supervisors with feedback as to how they can help subordinates in their personal growth and development.

- Setting objectives for future performance

According to Cameron (1989) the question of “ Why establish a formal system of performance appraisal?” is answered within the question itself with the word *formal*.

After all it seems clear that supervisors will naturally make appraisals and judgments regarding the performance of subordinates, whether an appraisal program exists or not.

Others like Gianakis (1992) ask why do performance evaluations persist in law enforcement in light of the documented weaknesses? Ratliff (1994) states that we conduct performance evaluations because the responsibility for accomplishing designated tasks makes performance evaluations both possible and necessary. The final proposal for why performance evaluations exist may be the most accurate, when Engells (1995) states that as early as the 1930’s performance evaluations were simply responses to criticism of the police.

An understanding of how evaluations are conducted is equally as important. Anderson (1994) states that expectations of performance evaluations should be clearly defined and supervisor and employee together should set specific goals. Henry (1998) has a similar belief when he states the criteria used to evaluate officers must be consistent with the police mission and how officers are trained to perform. Performance evaluations need to be so specific in job description and performance that according to Kriebel (1994) the Redmond Police Department in their Community Policing efforts developed a new patrol officer performance evaluation instrument. The department changed the evaluation criteria for officers exclusively to community policing driven projects.

Jimenez (1999) states that it is important to involve employees in the design of performance evaluations, this will allow for employees to take ownership of the process.

If employee's are involved in the design of performance evaluations, the "how to" of this process will be easily accomplished. Another consideration is open communication.

According to Diaz (1996) communication is an important factor in obtaining feedback and is essential for the improvement of performance.

The final area of literature review is based on when performance evaluations should be done. It is important to remember that performance appraisals are management tools and as such must be applied on a continuing basis. Evaluations are not a "one time shot" and officers should be evaluated throughout their career. That leads to the final piece of this puzzle, when should performance evaluations be conducted? Bernhardt (1991) states that performance evaluations should be done once or twice a year with once a year being the minimal. In his research Altom (1998) states that fifty percent of the organizations he surveyed conducted surveys on a semi-annual basis. Cruz (1994) adds another point of interest when he states that at the inception of an organization's performance evaluation process a three-month testing period should be used to determine any faults.

The majority of literature this research is based upon strongly agreed that a performance evaluation should follow an accurate and clear job description as well as job performance expectations/standards. Research consistently stated that if one is going to evaluate an individual, (s)he must first tell him or her what to do and how they are expected to do it. Although training supervisors to properly conduct personal evaluations was mentioned in several of the references, the issue felt short of what the author feels is needed.

The literature researched certainly did not discourage training and did often mention the necessity; however, distinctions between initial, in-service and refresher trainings were not addressed. Even more importantly was the subject of the organization's commitment to training. The mere implementation of the process suggests, at least on the surface, that organizations support the performance evaluation. Research discussions however did not show organizations actually having a plan for evaluating officers and then processing the data to improve both the organizations and the officer.

Again all the literature researched agreed that performance evaluations done properly would improve an officer's job performance. There's no arguing that a process, which looks at an individual's strengths and/or weaknesses on a regular basis, is going to improve performance. A weakness noted on the performance evaluation would clearly be understood by both the evaluator and evaluated, hopefully leading to open discussions on how the weakness would be connected. This open communication will provide an understanding of how to fix the problem, which will inevitably lead to improvement. The process if done correctly has never been the issue in question. The issue quite frankly is assuring that the process is done correctly in order to get those positive results.

METHODOLOGY

After reviewing the extensive and detailed literature on what performance evaluations are, why they are done, how they should be done and when they should be done, it would appear that law enforcement agencies have a good roadmap for ensuring success in the performance evaluation process. However simply stating why, how and when something should be done, does not necessarily ensure success. Key ingredients to

any successful process are proper training and follow-up. This leads back to the research question, “Are law enforcement agencies doing their part?”

Law enforcement organizations recognize the need to keep up with current trends in policing and police chiefs throughout the country also realize that police are more accountable today through civil litigations, than perhaps any other time in history. These two issues alone justify the implementation of performance evaluations.

The problem arises after the implementation of the performance evaluation. It is after the novelty disappears, and organizational priorities change that the performance evaluation becomes vulnerable to failure. Training for performance evaluations must be consistent so that they can be done correctly. It is the author’s opinion that if training is consistent and professional, employees are more likely to concur with a reported weakness. Additionally if training is consistent and employees receive benefits such as pay or transfers as a result of performance evaluations, fellow employees are more likely to accept those results rather than consider them as unfair or favoritism.

This is where the author believes the organization is not doing its part. Law enforcement supervisors are not receiving proper training to conduct performance evaluations. Furthermore law enforcement officers are having their careers impacted by performance evaluations conducted by untrained supervisors. On the other side of the coin it may be that some supervisors, knowing that they are effecting an officer’s pay, may compromise the accuracy of the performance evaluation so as not to negatively affect the officer (Heathfield 2000). Regardless if performance evaluations are done incorrectly for or against the employee, they are still incorrect.

This is basically stating that although organizations are not training their supervisors to conduct performance evaluations, they allow inadequate evaluations to affect employee pay, transfers and assignments. Surely, there are law enforcement organizational administrators who would be argue that this statement is inaccurate. The author, however, plans to examine the hypothesis of the research using a survey. The survey will ask eleven questions dealing with performance evaluations. The survey will be distributed to thirty law enforcement organizations and will require an organizational supervisor to fill out the survey. Both written and phone surveys will ask the same series of questions, addressing performance evaluations and the organizations process, to include training and data collected. The survey will not take into consideration the size and/or geographic location of the participating organizations. The information gathered from both surveys will be compiled into one analysis. The information will then be broken down into tables and percentages for each individual question.

FINDINGS

The first question of the survey asked, “Does your organization perform performance evaluations?” The question was intended to show the number of organizations that conduct performance evaluations. The results showed that twenty-three of the thirty organizations (77%) surveyed currently have a performance evaluation process. The remainder of the questions and analysis were directed to those twenty-three organizations.

The second question is shown in Figure 1 and was intended to show the frequency performance evaluations were completed by organizations. The survey showed that four of the organizations (17.4%) evaluated their employees on a quarterly basis. Three of the

other organizations (13%) evaluated their employees on a six-month basis. The remainder of the organizations, sixteen or 69.6% evaluated their employees on an annual basis.

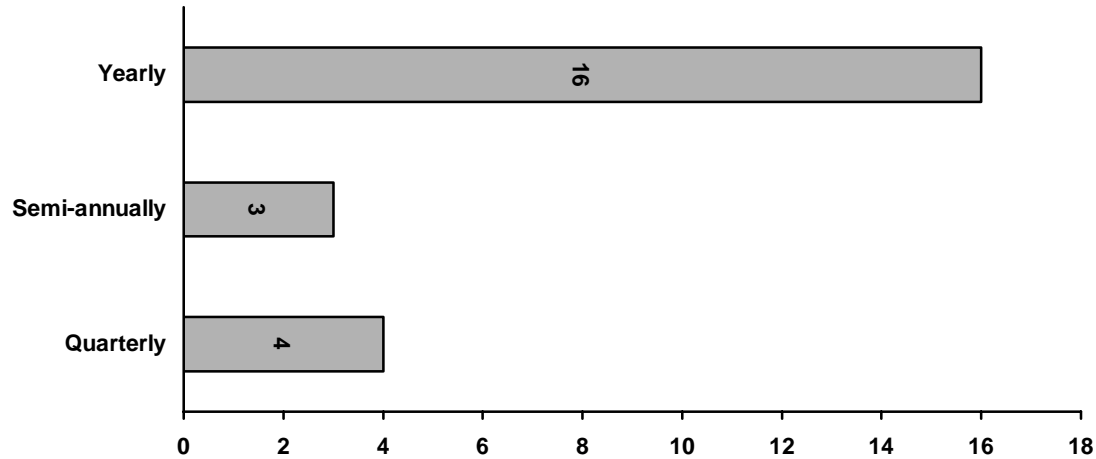


Fig.1. How often are employees evaluated in your organization?

The third question is reflected in Figure 2 and shows the level of training organizations provide for supervisors conducting performance evaluations. Only one of the organizations surveyed (43%) advised that supervisors receive forty hours of training prior to evaluating employees. One other organization also advised 4.3% of their supervisors receive sixteen hours of training prior to evaluating employees. Two organizations (8.7%) stated their supervisors received eight hours while three organizations (13%) advised their supervisors receive four hours. Four other organizations (17.4%) reported that their supervisors receive two hours or less of training prior to evaluating employees. Finally thirteen organizations (56.5%) reported that their supervisors received no training prior to evaluating employees.

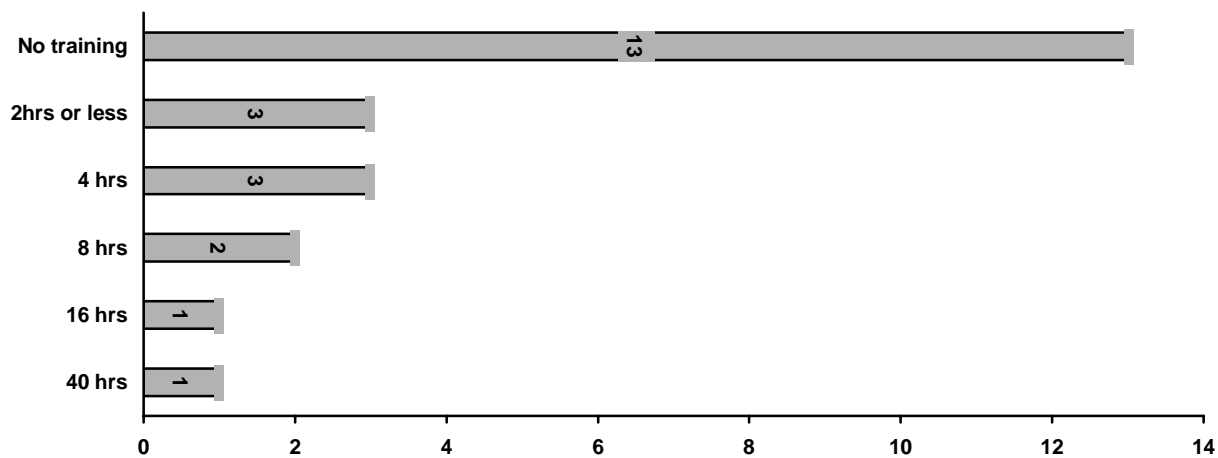


Fig.2. Amount of training supervisors receive.

The fourth question (Fig.3) was intended to show if agencies that provided performance evaluation training for their supervisors maintained a commitment to training. Only ten organizations reported on question #3; that their supervisors received some form of training prior to evaluating employees. Of those ten organizations, eight (80%) reported never again receiving any refresher training and the remaining two stated that they have received refresher training.

The fifth question asked, “When was the last time your agency provided you with performance evaluation training?” The information from this question was gained from the ten organizations that reported receiving training on question #3.

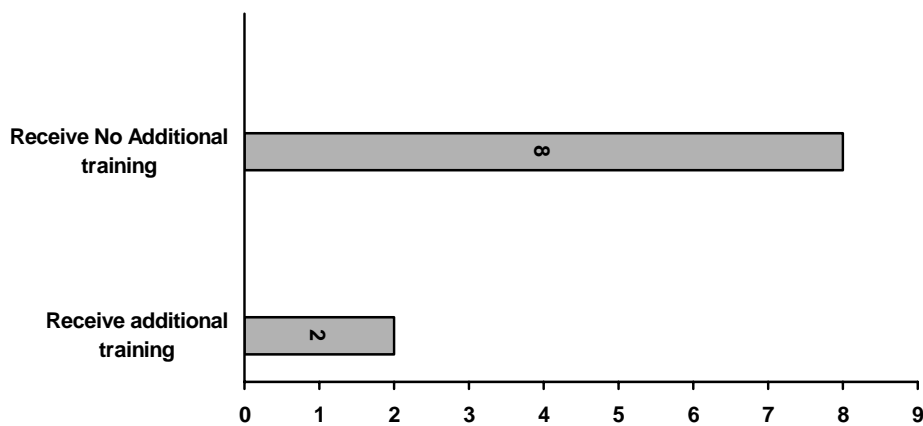


Fig.3. Continued or in-service training for those organizations receiving initial training

The intent of this question was to ascertain the frequency of the training provided for supervisors. The results showed that three of the ten organizations (30%) have received performance evaluation training within the last twelve months. Another three organizations (30%) show to have received within the past three years. Finally the results showed that four (40%) of the organizations that stated that their supervisors receive refresher performance evaluation training have not received training within the last four years with one organization stating it has been as long as ten years.

The sixth question asked, how long have you been doing evaluations? This data was retrieved from the twenty-three organizations that stated they currently conduct performance evaluations. The question was an attempt to ascertain whether or not there was a specific relationship between experience and conducting performance evaluations. The data showed a wide range of experience when it came to conducting performance evaluations. There were supervisor's who had only begun to conduct the performance evaluations within the last six months and yet there were some that had been conducting performance evaluations for over twenty years. The data given by the twenty-three

organizations was very evenly distributed and the author was unable to show any relationship between experience and conducting performance evaluations.

The seventh question asked, whether or not officers receive follow-up training on “needs improvement” standards. This question was intended to show what was done with the information gathered from performance evaluations. This data was retrieved from the twenty-three organizations that stated they currently conduct performance evaluations. The data showed that in seventeen organizations (73%) the officers with “needs improvement” standards do receive follow-up training. The data also showed that in six organizations (27%) in which officer’s had “needs improvement” standards the officers did not receive any follow-up training.

The eighth question asked: “In your opinion what percentage of employee’s evaluated need follow-up training?” The question was asked in an attempt to show if supervisors felt the performance evaluations had a purpose. Additionally, to determine what percentages of employees need additional training. This information was retrieved from the twenty-three organizations that stated they currently conduct performance evaluations. The data showed that sixteen of the supervisors (70%) felt that ten percent or less of the employees evaluated needed additional training. Additionally four of the supervisors (17%) felt that between twenty to fifty percent of the employees’ evaluated needed additional training. Finally three organizations (13%) felt that one hundred percent of employees evaluated needed additional training.

The ninth question is shown in Figure 4 and was intended to determine if performance evaluations were being properly conducted. The information was gathered from the twenty-three organizations that stated they conduct performance evaluations.

The information showed that eight organizations (35%) stated proper documentation is attached to all performance evaluations. Eleven organizations (48%) however stated that documentation is only attached if the employee requires additional training. Finally, four organizations (17%) advised that documentation is never attached to performance evaluations.

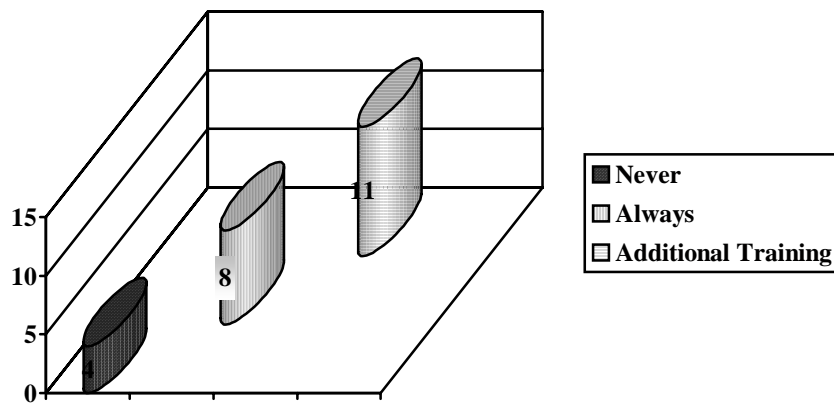


Fig.4. Is documentation attached to performance evaluations

The tenth question asked: “As a supervisor are you evaluated?” The question was asked in an attempt to provide information on two issues. First, to discover if untrained supervisors were themselves being evaluated. Second to ascertain whether or not supervisors themselves were being affected by performance evaluations conducted by untrained supervisors; i.e., they were in the same position as subordinates. If the subordinates and supervisors are equally receiving inaccurate evaluations negative effects on the organization are inevitable. This information was retrieved from the twenty-three organizations that stated they currently conduct performance evaluations. The data showed that twenty-two organizations (95%) evaluated the performance of its supervisors and only one organization (5%) did not.

The final question of the survey is very informative yet lengthy in describing. The question asked: “Do the results of performance evaluations have any impact on any of the following: an assignment, pay increases, training and/or transfers?” This question was intended to show if organizations were affecting employee’s careers with the results of performance evaluations. It was the author’s hope that by this time the survey would have established if supervisors received the proper training to conduct performance evaluations. For the purpose of analysis each of the issues addressed (assignments, pay, training, and transfers) was analyzed individually as answered by the twenty-three organizations. This was done primarily because several of the organizations allowed performance evaluations to affect more than one issue and to combine all the results may have implied different percentages from the actual.

Figure 5 shows that, eight of the twenty-three organizations, or 35%, allowed the results of performance evaluations to effect employee assignments.

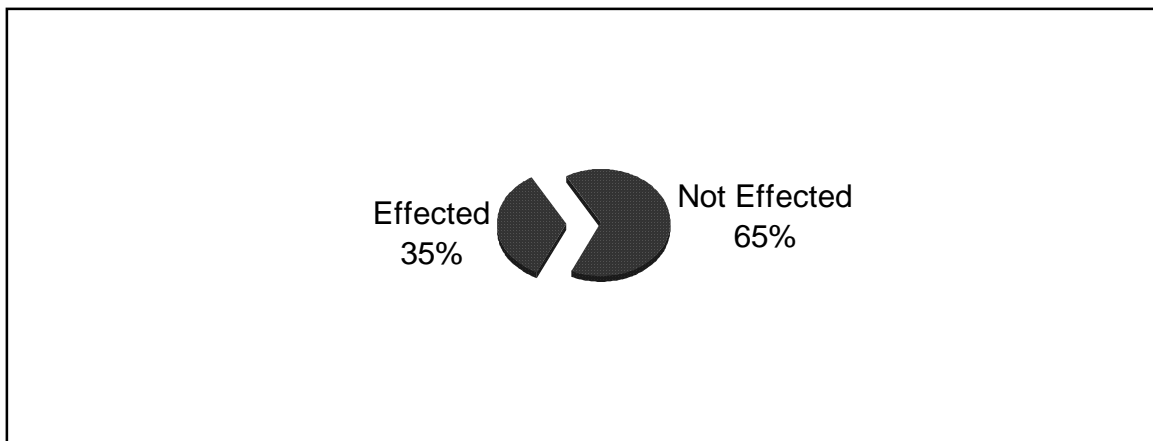


Fig.5. Performance Evaluations effect employee assignments

Figure 6 shows that eleven of the twenty-three organizations, or 48% allowed the results of performance evaluations to affect employee pay increases.

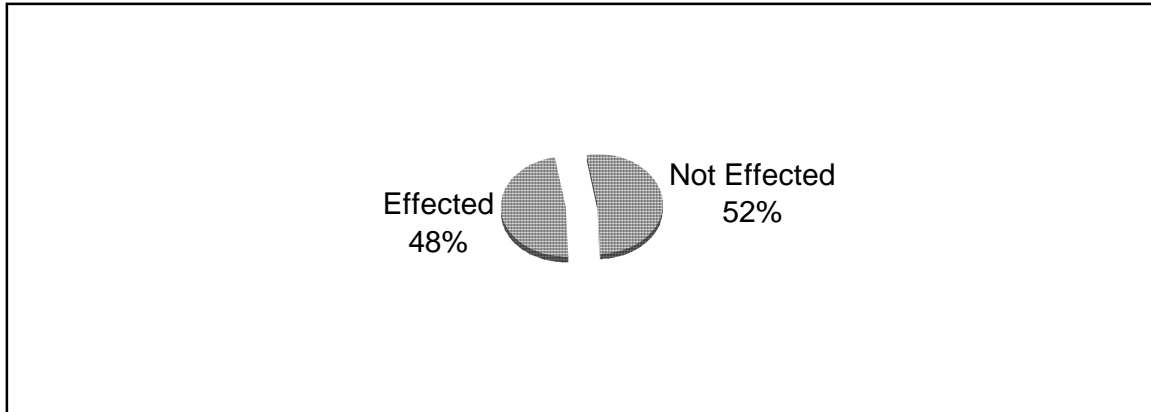


Fig.6. Performance Evaluations effecting pay increase

Figure seven shows that ten of the twenty-three organizations or 43% allowed the results of performance evaluations to affect employee training.

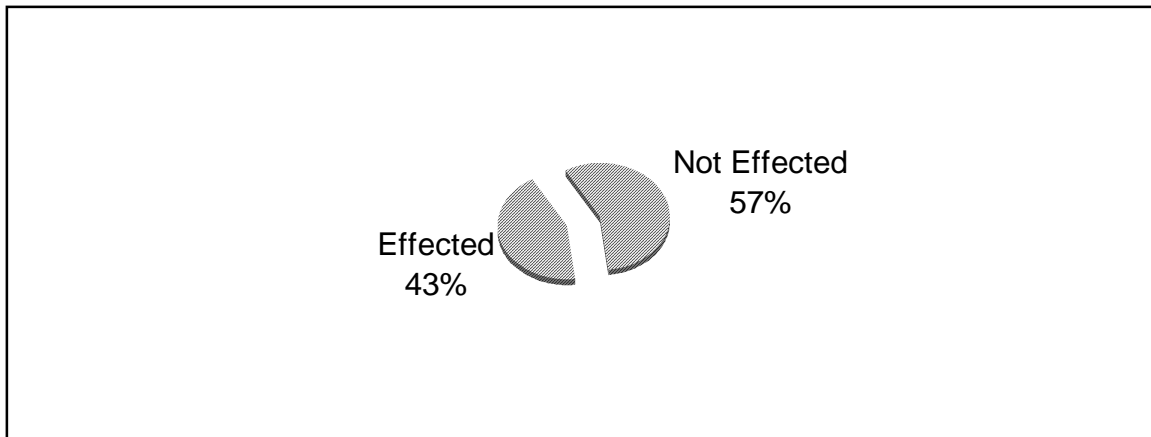


Fig.7. Performance Evaluations effecting employee training

Figure eight shows that eight of the twenty-three organizations or 35%, allowed the results of performance evaluations to affect employee transfers.

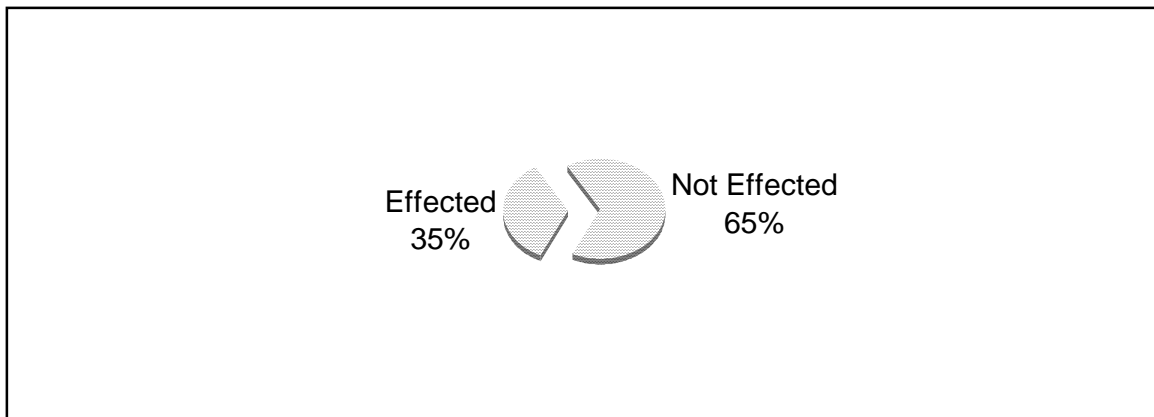


Fig.8. Performance Evaluations effecting employee transfers

These survey results show that an average of forty percent (40%) of these organizations are allowing performance evaluation results to affect employees in at least one of the four ways surveyed. Therefore we have people who are not properly trained conducting performance evaluations, the results of which will affect the employee's assignments, pay, training and transfers. What makes this percentage of even more concern is that question # 3 established that supervisors are not being properly trained.

CONCLUSION

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the question being researched is, "Are law enforcement organizations doing their part when it comes to performance evaluations?" The purpose of this research paper was to discover if law enforcement organizations were properly training supervisors to conduct performance evaluations. As discussed in the review of literature, in order for performance evaluations to be done properly, they require proper training. The author developed two hypothesis. First, law enforcement supervisors are not receiving proper training to conduct performance

evaluations. Second, law enforcement officers are having their careers impacted by performance evaluations, conducted by untrained supervisors.

The survey was given to supervisors and provided information allowing for presented conclusions. Seventy-seven percent of the organizations surveyed conduct performance evaluations. This shows that a majority of law enforcement organizations rely of performance evaluations as a tool for measuring employee performance. Seventy percent of the organizations stated that they conducted their performance evaluations on an annual basis. The research and review of literature revealed that at minimum performance evaluations should be done yearly. This implies that organizations may only be doing the minimum and not be placing the appropriate level of importance on employee performance evaluations.

Fifty-seven percent of the organizational supervisors stated their organizations provided no training on performance evaluations prior to conducting them. An additional twenty-six percent of the organizational supervisors stated they received four hours or less of performance evaluation training. This totals eighty-three percent of the organizations not providing adequate training. Based on this research, law enforcement organizations are not providing training for supervisors to properly conduct performance evaluations.

The survey showed seventeen percent of the organizations surveyed stated they had received training on performance evaluations prior to conducting them. It was then important to consider if training for those few organizations was continuous or simply given at inception. The results showed that only half of those organizations that received initial training ever provided any type of updated or refresher training. Although on a

smaller scale, this information also shows that even in the few incidents when training is provided, the commitment to provide updated or refresher training is lacking as much as the commitment to provide initial training.

Four different charts were presented to individually show the effects performance evaluations have on assignments, pay, training and transfers. It shows that between thirty-five and forty-eight percent of the organizations allowed performance evaluations to affect employee's in those areas. Those percentages averaged out to forty percent of the organizations allowing this to happen. All of these issues have a profound effect on an employee's career. Additionally, assignments, pay and transfers can have a direct impact on an employee's financial state. This section ends acknowledging that organizations are placing financial value on the results of performance evaluations, however not much importance on how those results come about.

The review of this information and research leads to the following conclusion. Large portions of the law enforcement organizations are using performance evaluations as a tool for measuring employee performance, but only on an annual basis. This amount of time between evaluations is inadequate; organizations need to conduct performance evaluations at a minimal semi-annually to ensure the process is consistent. This will allow employees to know on a regular basis what is expected of them and what they are doing right or wrong. Law enforcement organizations have failed to provide adequate training for supervisor and the small percentage that have only provided training at the inception. What is most alarming is that even though organizations provide inadequate training for the persons conducting evaluations, they allow the results of the evaluations to affect employee's assignments, pay, training and transfers.

This research was based on two hypotheses. The first hypothesis was that law enforcement supervisors were not receiving proper training to conduct performance evaluations. The research supported this hypothesis. Second was that law enforcement officers were having their careers impacted by performance evaluations that were conducted by untrained supervisors. The research supported this hypothesis as well.

To make it clear the author is not a disbeliever in the performance evaluation system. On the contrary the author believes that when used correctly employee performance evaluation can have several benefits. Supervisors should be monitoring their employee's performance and employees should know organizational expectations as well as what their strengths and weaknesses are. The author strongly believes that performance evaluations need to be done correctly. Just as proper evaluations can have several benefits, evaluations done improperly may have many negative effects.

Performance evaluations cannot be done correctly without proper training. Law enforcement organizations must realize that as a rule, supervisors need to be properly trained so that employees will be properly evaluated. This process of proper training will ensure a more professional environment that is properly accountable for its actions. This will ultimately lead to a better service to the community.

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Appendix

Survey

Please complete this survey for Hector Alcoser, a student of the Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute of Texas and to meet partial requirements of the Administrative Research Paper for the Leadership Command College.

1. Does your organization perform performance evaluations?
☐yes ☐no
2. How often are employees evaluated in your organization?
☐Quarterly ☐Bi-Annually ☐Yearly
3. How much training do supervisors receive *prior* to evaluating personnel?
☐ none ☐4hrs ☐8hrs ☐16hrs ☐40hrs ☐other
4. If you do receive initial training for conducting performance evaluations is there *any* refresher training (ex: in-service or annual training)?
☐yes ☐no
5. When was the last time *your agency* provided you with performance evaluation training? _____
6. How long have *you* been doing evaluations? _____
7. Do officers receive follow up training on “needs improvement” standards?
☐yes ☐no
8. In your opinion what percentage of employee’s evaluated receive follow up training. _____%
9. Is documentation attached with all evaluations or only ones requiring additional training?
☐all ☐additional training
10. As a supervisor are you evaluated?
☐yes ☐no
11. Do the results of performance evaluations have *any* impact on any of the following:
☐assignments ☐pay ☐training ☐transfers