

LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT INSTITUTE

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT THROUGH EFFECTIVE FEEDBACK

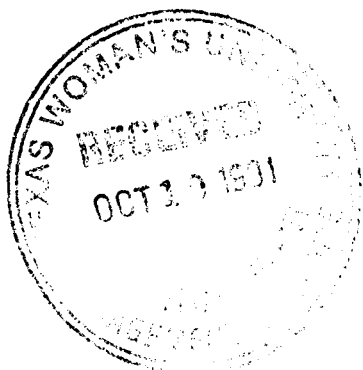
A RESEARCH PAPER  
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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION . . . . .	4
MANAGING PERFORMANCE . . . . .	5
The Planning Component	
The Managing Component	
The Appraisal Component	
ROLE TRAINING . . . . .	10
THE FEEDBACK PROCESS . . . . .	13
THE EMPLOYEE ROLE IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS . . . . .	15
Individual Motives to Seeking Feedback	
How Feedback is Attained	
Asking for Feedback	
THE SUPERVISORY ROLE IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS . . . . .	20
Clarifying Expectations	
Assessing Behavior	
Avoiding Stereotyping	
Language and Phraseology	
Goal Setting	
OTHER SOURCES IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS . . . . .	24
The Work Itself	
The Public	
The Supervisor	
Peers	

Other Co-workers

Family and Friends

FEEDBACK TRAINING . . . . .	30
CONCLUSION . . . . .	32
NOTES . . . . .	34
SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	37

## INTRODUCTION

Performance appraisal is often perceived by supervisors as a meaningless, cumbersome paperwork event. For the rated employees, it may be perceived as an unwelcome and sometimes threatening means for the supervisor to criticize them and their work performance. Unfortunately, few supervisors and employees have an adequate understanding of, or are prepared for, an appraisal system's potential for providing them a useful means to help both parties be more successful in their jobs.

"In a truly win/win approach designed to permit all involved to benefit from the process, managers and supervisors are prepared with training in planning, researching, conducting interviews, and writing performance appraisals. Similarly, employees receive training and orientation in how to prepare and interview so they become equal participants in clarifying expectations, feedback and negotiations. The communications skills of both supervisors and employees also generally need strengthening in order to achieve a truly win/win performance appraisal. Listening and giving and receiving feedback are essential abilities in the process; to undertake performance appraisal without them is to underutilize the value that is available for human resources development."<sup>1</sup>

This paper will examine and identify strategies for a performance process which is aimed at creating this "win/win" approach; that is, a performance process in which both employee and supervisor benefit. Specifically,

questions to be answered include: What is the difference between performance appraisal and performance management? What is the supervisor's role in managing performance? How is feedback important to the success of performance management? What is the employee's role in the feedback process? What is the supervisor's role in the feedback process? What sources of feedback exist in the law enforcement setting? What should be the design of effective feedback training for supervisors and employees?

#### MANAGING PERFORMANCE

Traditionally, when a new performance appraisal system is to be implemented in an organization, the performance appraisal forms to be used are given the most attention. Supervisors want to know how often they are to be completed, how to fill them out, who else reviews them and how much time will be invested in the new paperwork procedure. Employees' concerns focus on the perceived objectivity of the criteria and if the forms will be used to justify pay decisions, promotions or disciplinary actions.

Building a positive perception of the appraisal process and its usefulness requires attitudinal changes that start with top management and are conveyed through behavioral practices and training. In order to clarify the purpose of an organization's appraisal process, it is important to ensure that supervisors and employees have a common understanding of appraisal terminology. One author

describes the difference between performance appraisal and performance management:

"The reason performance appraisals are done in the first place is the belief that they will accomplish two things:

- Help employees understand the quality of their current performance and identify what they must do to improve it. Obviously, this objective implies changing employees' behavior.

- Motivate employees to improve their performance.

Again, clearly the implication of behavior change."<sup>2</sup>

But to be effective in changing behavior, performance feedback must occur as soon as possible after the employee displays the behavior in need of change. A single paperwork event (performance appraisal) is not designed to provide immediate feedback on performance; performance management does require immediate feedback. Since performance management occurs on a year-round basis, it can help employees understand the nature and quality of their recent performance, identify what they must do to improve and motivate them to improve.

### The Planning Component

Effective performance management has three basic components: planning, managing and appraising performance. The common element of these components is the communications process that occurs during each stage.

The first component, performance planning, not only focuses on the results to be achieved, but also includes "how" these results are to be achieved. Appraisal forms

often recognize the importance of the "how" by addressing areas such as cooperation, initiative, and leadership. Supervisors also must be able to gain employees' commitment to using desirable behaviors by relating the use of behaviors to the attainment of specific results: tying the "how" to the "what" during the performance planning process. Only then can the supervisor justify subsequent counseling, feedback, coaching and appraisal.

The planning strategy should solicit active participation of subordinates. A participatory planning process helps build commitment and minimizes conflict in subsequent appraisal discussions. Although planning for appraisals is usually completed prior to the next two components, it too, needs monitoring and revision to allow for changing work environments. In law enforcement, for example, new technology, law changes, policy practices, and community needs all play a part in the evolving job requirements of officers.

"Workers' performance levels also change over time because of experience, training or learning new skills, which cause previously set standards of performance to cease being appropriate or fair. If the performance review is merely a form to be completed, it fails to capture the dynamic job environment, and hence, it will not be a useful tool to either the supervisor or the employee."<sup>3</sup>

One method that can be used to facilitate the performance planning component, is to have both the supervisor

and employee write out a list pertaining to what the employee should accomplish, refrain from or continue to do. Specific job related knowledge or requirements should also be documented.<sup>4</sup> This exchange of expectations becomes the basis for which future feedback discussions are focused throughout the next component.

### **The Managing Component**

The second component, performance managing, is the daily process of working towards the performance expectations and standards set in the planning component. If performance is adequate or exceeds expectations, the supervisor provides positive reinforcement feedback to keep performance at a high level. If performance is lacking, the supervisor counsels or coaches the employee on improvement in these areas. This involves developing strategies with the employee to determine appropriate courses of action. Thus, for both the supervisor and employee, the strategy is one of problem solving not fault-finding.<sup>5</sup> Timeliness of this type of coaching feedback is critical. Problems are handled when action can be taken, thus eliminating the "surprise" elements of the appraisal interview. As noted earlier, the ideal time to discuss performance is when it actually occurs.

By actively soliciting the employee's participation as part of the ongoing managing component, another dimension is added to the evaluative nature of the supervisor's feed-



back. Getting the employee to evaluate his own performance allows the supervisor to see how the other person views the world. It provides the supervisor with insight into the other person. In addition, the supervisor might discover some interesting things about his own performance. For example, the employee may have failed to meet certain goals because the supervisor shifted priorities, causing the employee to repeatedly drop projects before completion. In other words, the employee's self evaluation permits the supervisor to gain valuable feedback that might not have been obtained as easily in any other fashion.<sup>6</sup>

#### **The Appraisal Component**

The final component, appraising performance, becomes a review or summary of prior information provided in the previous components. The discussion then focuses on planning for the future and employee development issues. Performance appraisal is both the beginning and end point of performance management. The analysis of past performance provides the basis of many of the next cycle's expectations. At the same time, it marks the end of the current appraisal cycle. Employees know what is expected of them and what is needed to achieve results during the upcoming period. The organization knows what results it can expect from employees and what resources are needed to help them achieve those results.<sup>7</sup>

Too little feedback during each component is usually

the norm in most organizations. This suggests that too few goal-related discussions also occur between supervisors and employees. For an individual to accept and apply feedback messages offered, these have to "fit" within his frame of reference. Understanding an individual's goals and explaining the organization's goals and needs becomes part of the role of the supervisor as a developer of people.

### ROLE TRAINING

For the performance management process to be successful and meaningful to the organization and the individual, managers and supervisors need role training as developers of people. "Training and cultural norms must define and reinforce managers' responsibilities to bring out the best in the people who report to them. Most management models emphasize the manager's role in managing performance."<sup>8</sup> To bring out the best in employees and to help them be successful in their jobs, supervisors need a broader frame of reference in which to manage performance and development. The role of the supervisor thus expands to include managing each employee's learning curve as well as performance. That is, supervisors use different strategies depending whether the employee performs below, at, or above expected levels. In repositioning the role of the supervisor to incorporate these strategies, Neil A. Stroul suggests that management training should help managers and supervisors answer these

questions:

- Do I want to be a manager?
- How do I feel about guiding or directing others' work?
- How do I feel about monitoring, problem solving, arbitrating and the like?
- What am I willing to do to be an effective manager?
- Does my staff believe I appreciate and look out for their interests?
- Do I understand what's going on? Are goals clear, job descriptions articulated, standards in place?
- Am I sufficiently informed that I can make knowledgeable assessments about the success and failure of my staff members' goal attainments?
- What am I doing to keep abreast of my staff's performance? Do I know what factors affect their performance? Do I collect information through first hand experience?
- Can I provide constructive feedback and jointly seek solutions to performance problems?
- Do I have hidden agendas? Do I really want to help? Is my goal to bring out the best in my staff? To bring out the best in each employee, what must I do?<sup>9</sup>

To bring out the best in each employee and help employees be successful in jobs, supervisors use three different role strategies. The first role is that of "counselor." This role is used for employees who do not meet expectations. In the counselor role, the supervisor both initiates and drives the intervention.<sup>10</sup> One study surveyed 598 police supervisors who were asked which management techniques worked best with their problem employees. Results showed that informal counseling was most likely to have been successful.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of employees who meet expectations, the role of the supervisor changes to the second role: "coach." With these employees, performance problems and successes are

instantly identified and discussed. The technique of "managing by walking around" is an effective way of facilitating the coaching role. Using this approach, supervisors interact with employees on their turf, inquiring about each one's performance and dispensing verbal feedback.<sup>12</sup>

The final role, "developer," is used for those employees whose performance exceeds expectations. As a developer of personnel, the supervisor collaborates with the employee to devise strategies to incorporate greater challenges into the employee's position. Developing may also mean preparing the employee to assume a new position involving more responsibility and challenge.

When counseling employees who perform below expectations, the supervisor both initiates and drives the intervention. In coaching and developing, the supervisor may initiate such action but it is the employee who drives it. In other words, while counseling is collaborative, the supervisor is in control. In coaching and developing, the employee, as the driving force, shares control with the supervisor.<sup>13</sup>

Obtaining support from supervisors as to these role changes requires an effective training effort. This effort should emphasize staff development as an essential responsibility, focus on collaboration skills that help supervisors share power, and give supervisors the technology they need to apply in their staff development activities. Performance

appraisal training can instill necessary confidence by teaching feedback skills, interpersonal effectiveness, and interviewing and problem solving techniques. Training which teaches developmental skills can contribute to the supervisor using the techniques to develop employees. While performance appraisal training teaches supervisors how to teach their own employees, it reinforces the staff development role as an essential managerial function.<sup>14</sup> The development of employees is a skill for which supervisors should be held accountable. If supervisors are not rewarded for developing and using performance management skills, setting expectations, monitoring performance, giving feedback, and conducting appraisal sessions, the system remains simply a form to be completed. Therefore, for the process to be effective and successful, supervisors must be taught the necessary skills, held accountable for effective performance management, and then receive positive feedback from upper management for demonstrating those skills.<sup>15</sup>

#### THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The most difficult and elusive part of appraisal management is the feedback process. Supervisors and employees alike can be taught with relative ease the steps to developing sound performance standards. Supervisors may be additionally skilled at observing employee actions and behaviors, recording their observations, measuring successes and problem areas, and translating these to the performance

appraisal instrument. For these areas, examples and practice, combined with oversight and reminders by the supervisor's boss, may be effective training methods. Training the supervisor to compare recorded observations about behavior and performance against the original performance standard is also a matter of example and practice.

Offering and receiving feedback, however, has been given little or no attention and is the area where most training programs fall short. Notice that in the processes of developing standards, observing behavior, measuring successes and problem areas, and completing the appraisal instrument, each task was approached from an "example and practice" training perspective.

Without a script for the most complex task, giving the feedback itself, learning what "should" be done does not help the supervisor overcome the first obstacle -- what words to say. Developing such an example is not an easy training task, nor is it one that has been perfected. Additionally, there is no one script that can guarantee a productive and stressless interaction. The actual approach depends on the culture of the workplace.<sup>16</sup>

Feedback, the process of communicating information, is an integral part of all three components of appraisal management: planning, managing and appraising. Both supervisors and employees receive feedback from and give feedback to many different sources. Some of these sources are within

the organizational structure, others fall outside the organizational setting and yet, both contribute to the overall perceptions about performance.

Becoming more aware of the ways feedback is demonstrated and offered by others may be the first step to improving supervisory and employee feedback skills. These feedback skills will be discussed as they relate to the employee, the supervisor and other sources that provide feedback to each.

#### **THE EMPLOYEE ROLE IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS**

To understand the employee's role as a participant in the feedback process it is important to analyze the motives that contribute to feedback-seeking behavior, how feedback is attained, and how to ask for feedback from others.

##### **Individual Motives for Seeking Feedback**

One of the motives for seeking feedback is for error correction. Individuals obtain information about quantity and quality of performance and thus can correct any errors that prevent them from achieving various goals. Therefore, employees are motivated to seek feedback in order to have a greater chance of achieving their desired personal and career goals.

Individuals have an inherent drive to evaluate themselves. "Individuals will first attempt to evaluate

themselves by comparison to objective, nonsocial referents such as the percentage of 'correct' behaviors. However, to the extent that such objective referents are not present or are difficult to interpret, individuals will make comparisons with others."<sup>17</sup>

Relationships with co-workers and peers contribute to self-monitoring behavior that becomes a source of personal satisfaction to the employee.

The desire to be effective and achieve some mastery over the environment is another motivating factor to feedback-seeking behavior. "This mastery leads to competence, a capacity to interact effectively with the environment."<sup>18</sup> The environment in this sense is the work setting and the desire to build the skills to effectively succeed in "mastering" job performance.

Employees experience conflict when they are faced with a situation for which the appropriate response is not clear. This conflict, in turn, motivates the seeking of additional information to reduce the uncertainty or ambiguity of the situation. To the extent that there is uncertainty about the relevance of a given behavior for the attainment of an individual's goal or goals, it would be predicted that the individual would actively seek feedback pertinent to the appropriateness of the particular behavior and, perhaps, alternative behaviors.<sup>19</sup> For example, when an employee asks his/her supervisor for clarification of a



policy or procedure, the purpose of this feedback request may likely be for uncertainty reduction.

These various motives may be present at various times in an employee's career. Any one motivator or a combination of them may be present at any given time; and the greater the motivation of the individual, the greater the extent to which feedback-seeking behavior will occur. It should be remembered that individuals may have a range of goals, some consistent with organizational goals, others inconsistent, and some parallel to or coexisting with the performance goals. These goals include performance in the current job, advancement, job security, personal growth, interpersonal growth, and so forth.<sup>20</sup> Each employee's goals serve as a frame of reference for self-evaluation. Feedback from a variety of sources offers information necessary for the individual to assess personal goal attainment status.

#### **How Feedback is Attained**

There are two ways in which feedback information is attained by the individual. The first is the sensing function in which an individual monitors the environment and takes in information. The sensing function only observes the environment in some fashion; it does not initiate active inquiries about performance and other behavior.<sup>21</sup> The second function requires action on the part of the individual. Simply put, this method requires that individuals

directly ask relevant sources in their environment about the effectiveness of performance.

Acting obviously takes more effort than sensing; thus, the sensing function is used more frequently than the acting function. Sometimes, however, the environment does not lend itself to providing the information that the individual is seeking. Therefore, the motivation to use the acting function is increased. Presumably, the accuracy of information derived from the acting function is of higher "quality" than information obtained by the sensing function.

The feature present in the feedback obtained from acting that is not acquired by sensing is the interpretive nature of such information. That is not to say that when feedback is derived from direct inquiry that the nature of the information is not subjective and dependent on the motives of the respondent. For example, if an employee asks his supervisor for direct feedback about his performance, the information offered by the supervisor may be less than accurate, especially if the feedback is unfavorable as opposed to favorable. In other words, if the "motive" of the supervisor is to protect the feelings of the individual, the unfavorable information is unlikely to be fully shared with the employee.

Studies have shown that supervisors give employees feedback less often about instances of poor performance than about instances of good performance. But when given, their

feedback about poor performance is more specific than their feedback about good performance.<sup>22</sup> This suggests that even though unfavorable feedback may be more specific, it may be distorted.

### Asking for Feedback

One factor that may serve to inhibit direct inquiry regarding one's work behavior is the public nature of such inquiries. Asking for feedback involves more risks than merely observing the work environment for feedback cues. The actual source who is asked may interpret the query in a variety of ways not all of them favorable to the inquirer.<sup>23</sup> For example, the request for feedback by an employee could appear as insecurity to the supervisor. Or, the requests by an employee revealing the desire to improve performance, could be interpreted as the admittance of substandard performance.

Dr. Susan Cassano suggests ways that minimize the risks of feedback-seeking to the inquirer: "Asking for feedback should come from an adult to adult posture -- not one of trying to please the boss." In order to reduce the risk of an interpretation by the supervisor that the employee is insecure or lacks self-confidence, the feedback request could be simply stated as "I make it a practice to ask for feedback every six weeks, etc. Or, I like to get information about my work performance to see if my work is meeting the expectations and needs of the department." To make

it clear that both favorable and unfavorable information is being requested, Dr. Cassano suggests making that part of the request as well: "I like to be clear about what I'm doing well, in addition to those things that I need to work on to meet the department's standards." An employee's behavior and work pattern can actually exceed the standards required and they need to know about those as well. But if need be the employee should be confident in pointing out their own behavior and offering feedback about that behavior to the supervisor: "I'm pleased with my progress in the areas of time management. I want to keep improving in this area. Do you have any suggestions for me?" Asking for feedback is a skill that, Dr. Cassano notes, takes practice to develop.<sup>24</sup>

An employee who desires feedback beyond that which is directly available can learn to use these methods as part of the process of obtaining feedback. Relying on supervisors to provide timely reactions may not provide the desired information necessary to make performance adjustments. Therefore, by assuming an active role in the two-way process, an employee can contribute to personal job success.

#### THE SUPERVISOR'S ROLE IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

The supervisory role of offering feedback begins with clarification of expectations about performance. Secondly, when providing feedback supervisors should focus

on behavioral examples which are relayed in descriptive terminology. Personal stereotyping and judgemental language should be avoided. Questioning and goal setting are two additional techniques that can be applied to offering feedback to the employee.

### **Clarifying Expectations**

Some supervisors mistakenly assume that if an employee doesn't understand what is to be accomplished, or how to go about accomplishing a task, the employee will ask for needed clarification. Supervisory expectations should, however, be made clear from the onset without making the assumption that the employee will recognize a responsibility to ask for such information. When providing feedback to an employee, supervisors should be aware of the words and language used in their conversations. Language used should be descriptive, focused, specific, brief and simple. Areas to be avoided include feedback that could be construed as judgmental, global, stereotyped, lengthy or complicated.

### **Assessing Behavior**

Specific feedback begins with the supervisor's clear assessment of the behavior noted. A vague statement such as, "you need improvement in your work quality" could be interpreted in numerous ways by the employee. One way to clarify this statement might be, "your reports contained inconsistencies in three areas" -- and then point them out.

Or, if quantitative measures are available to provide specificity, supervisors should use them. Citing descriptive instances of both favorable and/or unfavorable performance is another effective way to provide the employee with specific feedback. Supervisors should also focus on behavior and not the individual's personality when giving feedback. For example, telling an individual about a lack of initiative focuses attention on personality and not behavior thus, failing to identify the problem being presented. "You've been late for the start of your shift four times during the last six months" is a more focused statement designed to give behaviorally based feedback.

### **Avoiding Stereotyping**

Sometimes an appraiser has strong feelings about a subordinate's personal characteristics and behaviors. If personal characteristics such as grooming and speech are relevant to the job -- as they are with law enforcement officers -- they can be legitimately discussed as performance feedback. But if attire and other personal habits are not job relevant, it is best for the appraiser to try to develop greater tolerance for human diversity.<sup>25</sup>

One way to avoid personal stereotyping is to concentrate on the relationship (supervisor/employee) rather than the personality of the individual. In this way there is less motivation by unconscious prejudices, more equality in employee treatment and insulation against unwise personal

involvement.<sup>26</sup> The goal is to describe what has been observed not to judge it. The more evaluative or judging the feedback is, the greater the resistance from the employee.

### Language and Phraseology

Certain words are very judgmental and should be avoided. For instance, "weak," "strong," "incompetent," "indecisive," and "dictatorial," all elicit strong emotions and postures of defensiveness on the part of the receiver.<sup>27</sup> "Why" questions may also evoke a defensive response. When asking an employee, "Why didn't you do it this way?", the employee may feel blamed. "What" or "how" questions can elicit the desired information without the employee having to assume a defensive stance.

Questioning an employee about his or her behavior is another strategy to apply prior to offering feedback to the employee. Asking for information (input) has a double benefit. First, questioning the employee shows caring (symbolic value). Secondly, the result of such questioning may mean that the supervisor has new information he wouldn't have known otherwise (instrumental value).<sup>28</sup> The feedback message may even change or be revised based on the additional information obtained from the employee through the questioning process.

### Goal Setting

Supervisors should emphasize goal setting to improve

employee performance. Criticism of the employee should be avoided except as it relates to specific descriptions of inappropriate behavior. Studies regarding this issue show that far superior results were observed when the supervisor and the employee together set specific goals to be achieved, rather than merely discussing needed improvement. Frequent reviews of progress provide natural opportunities for discussing means of improving performance as needs occur, and this type of feedback is far less threatening than saving the information for the appraisal session.<sup>29</sup>

#### OTHER SOURCES IN THE FEEDBACK PROCESS

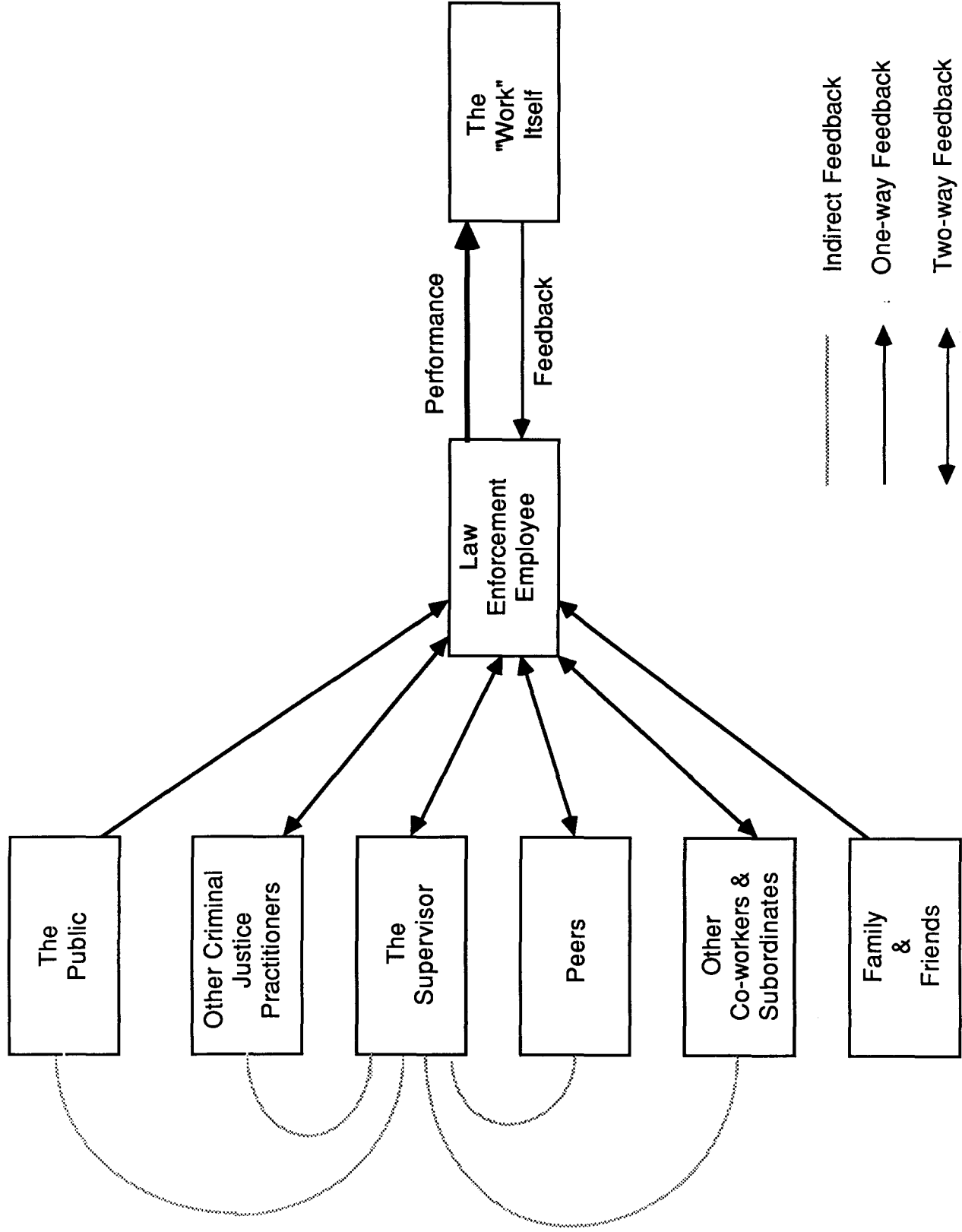
Figure 1 represents a model of feedback sources which can affect the performance of the law enforcement employee. Each feedback source provides a means for the employee to obtain information about performance. Some feedback sources also provide information about the employee's performance to the supervisor.

##### **The Work Itself**

The work itself is a direct source of performance feedback to the individual. In many jobs feedback is an inherent part of the task activities, particularly where the task predominantly involves activities or quantifiable output. In other jobs, feedback mechanisms can be added to make work related feedback more prominent or timely. This type of feedback relates to the mechanistic, not interper-



FIGURE I  
FEEDBACK SOURCES FOR THE LAW ENFORCEMENT EMPLOYEE



sonal, sources of additional task feedback. Employees may be able to evaluate their own job performance and thus, provide themselves with feedback. It is likely that several factors, such as the measurability of the task, the amount of the individual's experience with performing the task, and the individual's level of self-esteem, affect the extent to which individuals make such evaluations and the extent to which they use feedback from the work itself.<sup>30</sup>

### **The Public**

Law enforcement's clientele, the public, represent another feedback source to the individual. Officers who come into contact with the public are given feedback either informally (verbally and directly to them), or more formally through letters or phone calls to supervisors, etc.

Both feedback through the work itself and feedback from the public represent a one-way feedback informational process. Other sources of feedback to the law enforcement employee provide a two-way communications process.

### **The Supervisor**

The supervisor is traditionally seen as the principal source of performance feedback to the individual. This occurs possibly less often in law enforcement than other professions due to the inaccessibility of supervisors to their employees. For example, in many law enforcement agencies the supervisor maintains an office location while

the officers work in the field on patrol. And unless a field supervisor accompanies an officer to a call for service, much of the officer's work performance goes unnoticed. Observed work performance is minimal unless the supervisor is on-site when an officer performs his duties. The "work product" most often observed are written reports and verbal exchanges that occur before or after the work shift.

### **Peers**

Peers represent another two-way communication feedback source. The peer of the law enforcement officer is the one most likely to observe the performance of his fellow officers. Peer observations are likely to occur within a wide variety of situations and circumstances in the law enforcement profession. Performance feedback is perceived by the individual through comparison, observation and direct discussion with peers on a regular basis.

### **Other Co-workers**

Additional feedback occurs through exchanges with other co-workers such as investigators, dispatchers, support personnel, and, when applicable, subordinates. These co-workers in addition to the peer group may also provide feedback to the employee's supervisor. These informal exchanges also may affect the feedback given by the supervisor to the employee about his performance. This type of feedback is termed "indirect feedback" due to its transla-

tion through another.

### **Family and Friends**

Family and friends are still another feedback source to the individual. Although external to the workplace, both may have influences on the employee's on-the-job performance and may provide feedback relevant to the individual's performance. For example, the spouse of a law enforcement officer may contribute to or influence the officer's career decisions and goals concerning promotions, job assignment, shift work, and mobility. Additionally, poor performance can be a result of family problems or lack of support for the professional career choices of the individual employee. If this is the case, the supervisory role of counselor takes on an added dimension through the necessary understanding, problem solving and referral techniques that are required of him.

### **Other Criminal Justice Practitioners**

Other criminal justice system practitioners provide additional feedback sources to the individual and his supervisor. In the courtroom setting, for example, the feedback from the prosecutors and judges becomes the most significant information provided to the officer which may influence his performance motivation and direction in case preparation.

As Figure 1 represents, feedback gleaned from all possible feedback sources is then processed by the individu-

al and translated through his performance. As was mentioned earlier, an employee's decision to use feedback from other sources ultimately depends upon the consistency of such feedback with personal goals and motivation to be successful in the job.

Other factors relating to the feedback source itself also influence the individual's decision to make behavioral changes based on the feedback received. Source factors such as psychological closeness to the recipient, credibility, and power (that is, the ability to reward and punish) may affect how accurately a recipient perceives the message from the particular source. When the appraiser lacks credibility or power, the employee is likely to look for other sources of feedback about performance, such as co-workers, himself, subordinates, or the job itself. If the other sources disagree with the evaluator, the employee may adopt their views as a way of protecting his or her self-esteem.<sup>31</sup>

Three factors about the feedback message itself may additionally determine an individual's acceptance of feedback. These message factors are the temporal interval between the individual's behavior and the feedback about the behavior (timing), the positive or negative tone of the information about behavior (sign), and how often feedback is given to the recipient (frequency). The most important message characteristic in terms of its impact on the acceptance of feedback is the sign of the feedback. Favorable

feedback is generally more readily accepted by the recipient than negative feedback because favorable feedback is consistent with most individuals' self-images.<sup>32</sup>

Frequency of feedback is usually associated with improved performance. If the recipient's performance improves over time, this results in a greater proportion of favorable performance feedback. Timing may also be misconstrued with sign and frequency. Sources are likely to give positive feedback more quickly following the appropriate behavior than they are to give negative feedback following behavior appropriate for such feedback.<sup>33</sup>

As supervisors and employees become cognizant of the potential for feedback to affect their job success and recognize the sources of feedback which influence their goal attainment, the next step becomes a training effort. Training can enhance and improve feedback techniques and skills for supervisors and employees alike.

### **FEEDBACK TRAINING**

With the emphasis on feedback as part of the roles of both the supervisor and the employee, the design of training relating to feedback techniques becomes paramount to the performance management process. Communications training can also improve effectiveness in other areas of a law enforcement professional's scope of "relationships." That is, techniques that can be used in positively affecting the supervisory/employee feedback process can also be useful

when dealing with the public, suspects, crime victims, other co-workers and peers. With this indirect benefit of feedback training, law enforcement's implementation of such a training effort is an even greater investment. By design the training should be interactive where participants practice and apply effective communications skills and techniques. Video taped role-play situations, for example, where a "supervisor" is counseling an "employee" about improved performance, provide trainees with meaningful feedback about their own verbal and non-verbal communications skills. Emphasis should be placed on developing the listening skill as a crucial component of effective feedback.

Listening techniques can include discussion and application of specifics such as ways to actively listen by maintaining eye contact, asking open-ended questions, waiting for answers to questions before moving on and providing confirmation that the speaker was understood. These techniques tell the speaker that the listener is interested thus encouraging more information to be shared. Since people often listen selectively, they also interpret things differently.<sup>34</sup> Thus, summarization is one way for a supervisor to determine what message has been received by the employee and is another technique that can be taught as a listening related feedback skill.

It is recommended that both supervisory personnel

and employees receive the benefits of feedback training to maximize its usefulness. Since feedback is a two-way process, it would not be as productive to have only supervisory staff trained in feedback techniques. By training an integrated group of participants, the feedback from the exchange of ideas and information should provide both supervisors and employees with greater insight into the other's perspectives. The collaborative nature of problem solving can also be enhanced through the blending of supervisory and line level participants.

#### CONCLUSION

Performance appraisal is not an annual event. For the purpose of helping supervisors and employees alike to be successful in their jobs, performance management is a collaborative activity that occurs continually. Supervisors should be prepared to assume the three roles necessary to administer performance management strategies -- that is, the roles of coach, counselor and developer. This is done through role training after they have seriously acknowledged and accepted the multi-faceted aspects of supervisory responsibilities.

Supervisors and employees share a partnership in performance management. For performance management to succeed for both the organization and the individual, effective feedback becomes the principal means. Skills of giving, receiving and asking for feedback require development



for all participants in the process. Feedback skills can be developed through training efforts and practice. Once trained, supervisors should be held accountable for managing performance and developing their personnel.

In the law enforcement profession, feedback sources are numerous and varied. To understand the individual's performance behaviors, it should be considered that all or any of these sources can contribute to an employee's ultimate success within the organization through the influence of each source's feedback.

When ongoing feedback is combined with mutual goal setting between supervisors and their employees, the result is not just the ability to manage performance; motivation and performance levels also are increased, thus creating the "win/win" situation for both the supervisor and the employee.

## NOTES

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8. Neil Stroul, "Whither Performance Appraisal," Training and Development Journal (November, 1987): 70-74.

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