

Developments In Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 17, 1990

THE RESULTS OF USING THE EXPERIENTIAL ACTIVITY OF GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION IN A BUSINESS POLICY SETTING

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ABSTRACT

During the 1989 ABSEL Conference, the strategy of using Group Performance Evaluation as an experiential activity was presented. Following the presentation, the recommendation was made to test the idea of Group Performance Evaluation in the capstone Business Policy course. This seemed to be an interesting and useful recommendation. The central question asks if using this technique would produce better results for the student teams and higher levels of motivation, commitment, performance and satisfaction for individual team members. This paper will review the technique of Group Performance Evaluation and then report the empirical testing and results that help answer these questions.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The current literature on performance evaluation includes several articles that support the concept of self-evaluation. A few of these also promote the use of self-evaluation in a team format. A brief summary of this is presented now.

In his paper on performance evaluation, John Lowrie (1989) discusses the value of self-performance appraisal, suggesting that self-evaluation is more complete and more likely to be valid. He emphasizes that these advantages are to be expected when the focus is on key duties and behaviors, and the evaluation is done by the individual and other trusted people involved with the job.

In a field study conducted by Fos and Dinur (1988), they report that self-evaluation was able to predict success over a two year military training period. The results of the study support the idea that individuals have the capability to perform reliable self-evaluations in a way that can predict subsequent performances.

Mabe and West (1982) report a review of 55 studies of self-evaluation. Among their conclusions, they report that individuals with high intelligence, desire for achievement and perceived internal control are able to more accurately rate their abilities. Important conditions for valid self-evaluation include a focus

on actual performance rather than ability, the use of a valid comparison group, expected validation, experience, and confidentiality. Their focus was on individual self-evaluation, but their conclusions are also useful in a team context.

Edwards and Sproull (1985) report that a large research and development organization supplements the supervisory evaluation system with a team evaluation process, in order to enhance performance feedback for employees in a matrix or project management system. This participative performance evaluation process reportedly reduces management time required in the evaluation process, compared to traditional techniques. Other advantages include multiple inputs from ratee-selected observers, reduction of bias, and improved performance feedback because of the structure of the process and reduction of supervisory defensiveness.

Edwards and Verdini (1986) speculate that the key to motivation is found in the organization's recognition and reward structure. This reward system requires the use of a valid performance measurement system that provides fairness, accuracy, simplicity, timeliness and fast response. These authors promote the use of a dual system that combines the traditional supervisory appraisal with multiple peer ratings.

Peggy Lanza (1985) suggests that managers should supplement traditional individual performance appraisals with periodic team appraisals. Team appraisals put the supervisor in a supportive coaching position, provide him or her with valuable information and serve as a vehicle for resolving interpersonal conflicts. For this approach to be successful, Lanza emphasizes the need for trust and confidentiality.

The experiential activity of Group Performance Evaluation conforms with most of the recommendations that were included in this literature. A description of Group Performance Evaluation will now be presented.

REVIEW OF GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

The experiential activity of Group Performance Evaluation can be used at the

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completion of any group task or any significant portion of a group task. The Group Performance Evaluation (or GPE) is an analytic activity that focuses on the process of the group 'as well as the task of the group. The activity can take up to two hours, depending upon the nature of the group and the desire and ability of the group members to communicate with each other.

To facilitate this communication, there are a number of specific guidelines for the GPE. The first guideline is to focus on present and future group strengths. The goal of GPE is to increase the abilities, capacities and commitments of the members of the group, and this seems to be better accomplished when the direction of the discussion focuses on strengths of the group. Included here is a discussion of the current strengths, how they were developed and how they have been used to successfully complete the group task. This discussion of strengths also includes an examination of how the current group strengths can be used in future tasks, and how the group can develop additional strengths that can be used in the future.

The second guideline of GPE is to include specific examples in the discussion of strengths. Who provided the strength? How was it developed? When and where was it used? How can it be further developed? How can it be used in future tasks? The use of specific examples causes the Group Performance Evaluation to become concrete and increases the positive impact of the GPE in future group work.

The third guideline in the Group Performance Evaluation is to maintain a strictly positive direction in the discussion. While the traditional inclination might be to follow a discussion of the group's strengths with a discussion of weaknesses, in the Group Performance Evaluation any discussion of weaknesses is avoided. This is because the discussion of weaknesses generally becomes divisive and the group members become defensive. Listening is reduced because group members are focusing on their defense, and the goals of GPE (increased abilities and commitments) are not achieved. Instead of discussing the group's weaknesses, the experience in using GPE shows that these measures can be very constructively covered in the discussion of future improvements and strengths. If the group has a weakness that can be resolved leading to group improvement, then that topic can be addressed in a positive direction. However, in the rare situation when the group has a weakness that for one reason or another is not amenable to improvement, then any discussion in GPE of that weakness will reduce the effectiveness of the group and therefore is avoided.

The fourth guideline in Group Performance Evaluation

is to recognize that the views being shared are simply the opinions of the group members, and therefore the group members should claim ownership of those views of opinions. Instead of saying, "The main obstacle is..." say "As I see it, the main obstacle is..." In the first statement, an opinion is being stated as though it were a fact, although in reality it is an opinion. This generally leads to either an excessive discounting of the statement or to an unprofitable discussion about the correctness of the statement. In the second statement, the opinion is recognized as an opinion. This generally leads to either a consensual validation and agreement with the opinion or to a statement of opposing opinions which can then be discussed as opinions. By recognizing an opinion as an opinion, the group discussion does not avoid disagreement; however, it is able to avoid the loss of time and resources that results when opinions are confused with facts.

The final guideline in Group Performance Evaluation is to ensure that this evaluation is a fun and enjoyable experience. This should be an opportunity to share useful reflective insights with a group of friends who have successfully worked together to accomplish a meaningful group task.

TESTING THE GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION IN THE POLICY CLASS

The activity of Group Performance Evaluation is expected to result in at least six benefits for the group and the group members. These are:

- (1) Greater commitment to the success of this group
- (2) Greater willingness to invest time in the group by group members
- (3) Greater perception of success in the group accomplishment
- (4) Greater individual satisfaction with the results of the group
- (5) Greater trust between members of the group
- (6) Greater enjoyment in working with the group in the future.

Quite often, in the policy class when the students are formed into teams, it seems that one or two of the team members assume the workload of the team and the remaining team members simply coast. When this happens, the "working" students often feel unfairly burdened, and the "coasting" students receive less value from the class. It was expected that if the Group Performance Evaluation technique was successful, and the six preceding benefits were realized, then this problem of coasting would be reduced or eliminated.

The following discussion will report on the testing of these expected benefits.

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The Subjects

Participants in the study were upper division students (primarily seniors) enrolled in a business curriculum at a large western university. The participants were divided into two categories. The first was a control group and the second was a treatment group.

There were 92 students in the control group, 40 females and 52 males. They had not received training concerning the group performance evaluation activity and based on their responses on their normal group experience.

The treatment group was composed 32 students, with 18 males and 14 females. They were randomly divided into groups of five or six and were asked to work together to prepare and present the policy cases and to prepare a written case. In the beginning of the class, they were informed that a Group Performance Evaluation exercise would be required at a later point in the semester, and a short discussion reviewed the elements and expectations of the Group Performance Evaluation. This discussion of the future performance evaluation activity helped to solidify the students' understanding of GPE and to build the perception of individual accountability.

The principles of Group Performance Evaluation were demonstrated each time one of the student teams presented a case to the class (each team presented twice). At the end of the presentation, attention was moved away from the issues of the case and was focused on the strengths of the presenting team. All class members were asked to give positive feedback to the presenting team. This feedback was followed by asking the members of the presenting team to evaluate their strengths and to recognize present and future strengths. The discussion was kept strictly positive. This promoted a good atmosphere for class members and helped the less assertive class members to feel more comfortable and less threatened when participating on the presenting team.

At the end of the term each team completed the Group Performance Evaluation. Then the individual class members were asked to complete the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

To test the impact of Group Performance Evaluation, questions focused on the six issues of (1) commitment, (2) amount of time spent, (3) perceived level of success, (4) amount of satisfaction with the group performance, (5) level of trust, and (6) enjoyment in working with the group members again.

These six issues were measured by questions using seven-point Likert scales, with verbal anchors ranging from "low" to "high". The midpoint for each

question was neutral.

The questionnaire was administered to both the treatment group and the control group. The mean responses from the two groups were compared for each question. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF MEANS FOR EACH QUESTION

| | Control Group | | Treatment Group | | t value | Significance |
|--|---------------|---------|-----------------|---------|---------|--------------|
| | Mean | Std Dev | Mean | Std Dev | | |
| 1. Commitment to the Group's Success | 6.08 | .873 | 6.44 | .716 | 2.04 | .043 |
| 2. Amount of Time Given | 5.28 | .987 | 6.53 | .761 | 6.51 | .000 |
| 3. Perceived Success of the Group | 5.88 | 1.16 | 6.56 | .619 | 3.18 | .000 |
| 4. Satisfaction with Group Results | 4.88 | 1.33 | 6.41 | .712 | 6.29 | .000 |
| 5. Level of Trust Felt in the Group | 4.76 | 1.23 | 6.25 | .984 | 6.17 | .000 |
| 6. Enjoyment in Working with the Group in the Future | 5.04 | 1.39 | 6.38 | .707 | 5.18 | .000 |

Discussion of Results

As shown in Table 1, all six questions comparisons resulted in differences that were significant at the $p < .05$ level and all but the first were significant at the $p < .001$ level.

The first question's focus was on the individual's commitment to group success. The control groups mean was 6.08 compared to 6.44 for the treatment group, resulting in a t value of 2.04, $p = .043$. It appears that participation in a Group Performance Evaluation leads to greater individual commitment.

The second question was focused on the amount of time given to the group task. Comparison mean scores were 5.28 and 6.53 ($t = 6.51$). The means were significantly different with $p < .001$. The conclusion drawn from this difference is that people apparently are more willing to invest their time when the experience of GPE is included.

The third pair of means involve the perceived success of the group. The means (5.88 and 6.56) were significantly different ($t = 3.18$, $p < .001$), leading to the conclusion that group members using GPE will perceive their groups to be more successful. This conclusion can be more fully appreciated when one recognizes that the focus of the GPE is on the successful experience of the group.

The fourth pair of means were for the question concerning satisfaction with the group results. The means of 4.88

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and 6.41 were also significantly different ($t=6.29$, $p<.001$). This large difference in means supports the expectation that participation in GPE results in a greater amount of satisfaction with the results of the group task.

The fifth question tested the level of trust felt by group members. The control group mean of 4.76 was the lowest of the six means and was also the closest to the neutral score of 4. While there were many subjects reporting a relatively high level of trust in the control group, there were also many who reported a low level. The treatment group mean on question 5 was 6.25. Apparently, when the group experience includes participation in GPE, the trust felt within the group increases. The difference in trust levels for the two groups was significant at the .001 level ($t=6.17$, $p<.001$).

The final question's focus was on the issue of whether group members would enjoy working with the same group in the future. As with the previous questions, the treatment group responded significantly more positively with mean scores of 5.04 and 6.38, $t=5.18$ and $p<.001$.

Some statisticians would suggest that this data should be tested using non-parametric analysis. For example, see Practical Non Parametric Statistic by W.

test, once again each of the six comparisons indicate that there is a significant difference between the control group and the treatment group with significance in two-tailed probabilities ranging from .0412 down to .0000.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the questionnaire provide additional support for the use of Group Performance Evaluation. In the policy class, the experiential activity of reflectively reviewing performance group, results in higher levels of motivation, commitment, performance and satisfaction for individual members and improved results for the group. These conclusions are still only tentative, based as they are on self-feedback in the questionnaires that can be influenced by many complex factors in addition to the GPE experience. However, additional verbal feedback has been received from students and practicing managers who have been instructed in GPE and have used it. This verbal feedback consistently supports the results in this paper, and suggests the continuing development, refinement and utilization of Group Performance Evaluation.

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TABLE 2
RESULTS OF MANN-WHITNEY U-WILCOXON
RANK SUM W TEST

| | Control | Treatment | U | W | Z | P |
|--|-----------|-----------|-------|--------|----------|-------|
| | Mean Rank | Mean Rank | | | | |
| 1. Commitment to the Group's Success | 58.89 | 72.88 | 1140 | 2332 | -.2.0417 | .0412 |
| 2. Amount of time | 51.81 | 93.23 | 488 | 2983 | -5.8196 | .0000 |
| 3. Perceived Success of the Group | 56.90 | 78.59 | 957 | 2515 | -3.1369 | .0017 |
| 4. Satisfaction with Group Results | 51.54 | 94.02 | 463.5 | 3008.5 | -5.9137 | .0000 |
| 5. Level of Trust Felt in the Group | 51.86 | 93.08 | 493.8 | 2978.5 | -5.7313 | .0000 |
| 6. Enjoyment in Working with the Group in the Future | 52.98 | 89.88 | 596.0 | 2876.0 | -5.1556 | .0000 |

J. Conover, where he recommends that because of the discrete nature of the data, the analysis should be non-parametric. Therefore, to also satisfy those who agree with Conover, a second analysis of the data was run on SPSS with the non-parametric command. The specific test used was the Mann-Whitney U-Wilcoxon Rank Sum W Test, analyzing the similarity of two groups. The results of the analysis are given in Table 2.