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THE IMPACT OF USING GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION AS AN EXPERIENTIAL EXERCISE

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ABSTRACT

During the 1988 ABSEL Conference, a presentation introduced the strategy of using Group Performance Evaluation as an experiential activity. One of the questions addressed by those in attendance focused on the impact of the experience of Group Performance Evaluation and its effect on the behavior and experience of group members. Specifically, does the use of Group Performance Evaluation result in higher levels of motivation, commitment, performance, and satisfaction for individual members and improved results for the group? This paper will review the nature of Group Performance Evaluation and then provide the empirical results that begin to answer those questions.

REVIEW OF THE GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

A review of the current literature provides support for individual involvement in performance evaluation. For example, the work by Campbell and Lee published in the Academy of Management Review (1, 1988) supports the belief that self-appraisals can improve future job performance. Another example was published by Farh, et. al. in Personnel Psychology (2, 1988). They include in their conclusions the finding that participants clearly prefer the self-appraisal process to the traditional supervisor-prepared performance evaluations. A third example is Fletcher's work in the Journal of Management Development (3, 1986), where he reports that motivation increases in the employee who participates in a self-appraisal system. As a final example, Peter Gibb recommends in the conclusion of his work in the Personnel Journal.

The experiential activity of Group Performance Evaluation can be used at the completion of any group task or any significant portion of a group task. The Group Performance Evaluation (or GPE) is an introspective, analytic activity that focuses on the process of the group as well as the task of the group. The activity generally takes between one and three 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 group members. This seems to be better accomplished when the direction of the discussion focuses on strengths of the group. Included here are 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 more solid and 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 the same issues 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, if 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 GPE 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 or 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 was 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 immediately 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 claiming opinions as opinions, the group discussion does not avoid disagreement; however, it is able to avoid the loss.

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 IMPACT OF GROUP PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

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

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- (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

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

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 99 students in the control group, 45 females and 54 males. They had not received training concerning the group performance evaluation activity and based their responses on their normal group experience.

The treatment group was composed of 61 students, with 33 males and 28 females. They were randomly divided into groups of five or six and were asked to work together to prepare and present class presentations and to prepare a written paper. 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 that 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.

After the first round of significant group tasks had been accomplished (each group had prepared and given a class presentation), each team was asked to engage in a Group Performance Evaluation and to prepare a short written summary of the results of that activity. Each group repeated this same activity at the end of the term after they had completed all of the required group tasks. Then the individual class members were asked to complete the questionnaire.

The Questionnaire

To test the impact of the Group Performance Evaluation, the questions focused on the six issues: (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 using one-way analysis of variance. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR EACH QUESTION

	Control Group		Treatment Group		F Score	Significance
	Mean	Std Dev	Mean	Std Dev		
1. Commitment to Group's Success	5.82	1.03	6.48	.744	18.67	<.01
2. Amount of Time Given	5.37	1.05	6.26	.728	33.88	<.01
3. Perceived Success of Group	5.79	1.00	6.69	.564	41.12	<.01
4. Satisfaction with Group Results	5.02	1.25	6.51	.829	68.34	<.01
5. Level of Trust Felt in Group	4.82	1.12	6.31	.923	76.51	<.01
6. Enjoyment in Working with Group in the Future	5.11	1.25	6.54	.959	58.36	<.01

Discussion of Results

As shown in Table 1, all six-question comparisons resulted in differences that were significant at the $p<.01$ level.

The first question's focus was on the individual's commitment to group success. The control group mean was 5.82 compared to 6.48 for the treatment group, resulting in an F score of 18.67. It appears that participation in a Group Performance Evaluation leads to greater individual commitment.

The second question comparison was focused on the amount of time given to the group task. Comparison mean scores were 5.37 and 6.26 ($F=33.88$). The means were significantly different with $p<.01$. The conclusion drawn from this difference is that people apparently are more generous with their time when the experience of GPE is included.

The third pair of means involve the perceived success of the group. The means (5.79 and 6.69) were significantly different ($F=41.12$, $p<.01$), leading to the conclusion that group members using GPE will perceive their groups to be more successful. This conclusion can be more fully understood when one recognizes that the focus of the GPE is on the successful experience of the group.

The fourth pair of means was for the question concerning satisfaction with the group results. The means of 5.02 and 6.51 were also significantly different ($F=68.34$, $p<.01$). 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's mean of 4.82 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 that reported a low level. The treatment group's mean on question 5 was 6.31. Apparently, when the group experience includes participation in GPE, the trust felt within the group

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increases. The difference in trust levels for the two groups was significant at the .01 level ($F=76.51$, $p<.01$).

The final question's focus was on the issue of whether the group member 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 5.11 and 6.54, $F=58.36$ and $p<.01$.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the questionnaire provide additional support for the use of Group Performance Evaluation. The experiential activity of reflectively reviewing performance as a group appears to result 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 student 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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