

# Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 15, 1988

## A FORM AND PROCESS FOR NONCONFIDENTIAL PEER EVALUATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

The authors present a form for collecting peer evaluations and describe a process for administering the evaluations which has been used successfully in a number of classes. It is hoped that others may benefit from the use of the form and the process.

### INTRODUCTION

Much of the work done by students participating in simulations, cases, and experiential exercises is done in groups. Students derive many benefits from group interaction. These include higher quality solutions/ output, the opportunity to develop interpersonal skills, plus the opportunity to learn from, and exchange ideas with ones peers. Of course, group work carries with it a variety of issues which do not arise when students work individually. Much has been written about such things as group cohesiveness, group composition, etc. [E.g., see 4 and 21. Unfortunately, as anyone who has worked in groups for any period of time can attest, there can be considerable disadvantages to group work.

Problems associated with working in teams tend to be especially acute in an academic setting because the participants are all peers. There is no real superior-subordinate relationship as would be found in the military or in the business world. Team members typically have little real power to punish fellow team members who are unreliable, incompetent, obstinate, or nonparticipative. Of course, the instructor of the class has the power to penalize or reward performance by assigning appropriate grades. But, when students work in groups, the instructor often lacks the information needed to assign grades which accurately reflect individual performance. The instructor seldom has enough personal contact with each group to reliably assess the relative contributions of each team member. This is especially true when team meetings occur outside of class.

Some instructors use peer evaluations as a basis for assigning individual grades. In fact, peer evaluation forms are sometimes included in the materials provided with simulation games. [E.g., see 1, p. 67 and 3.] Generally these evaluations are completed at the end of the exercise and are confidential.

A problem with confidentially evaluating teammates at the end of an exercise is that there is no opportunity for students to adjust their performance to meet the desires of their teammates. If a team member fails to attend meetings or is physically present but makes no attempt to contribute, he/she cannot help but realize that he/she is not meeting the expectations of his/her teammates. However, most experiential exercises are multidimensional.

Situations can easily arise where, as a result of differing expectations and/or differing perceptions of what constitutes acceptable performance, group members may believe that they are meeting the expectations of others when in fact they are not. Since classmates, especially undergraduates, are often reluctant to confront their peers, situations such as this may go on indefinitely.

Unrecognized, genuine misunderstandings have several negative consequences. Satisfaction with the team and, indirectly, with the exercise is likely to suffer, and a potential learning opportunity in group participation may be lost. In addition, if confidential evaluations are used, the "offender" may never become aware of his/her deficient performance and, as a result never gets the chance to correct the inappropriate behavior. As a consequence, the grade assigned to the "offender" may be unjust.

Of course, open, nonconfidential evaluations also pose problems. The temptation to avoid conflict coupled with the desire to avoid hurting the feelings of another is likely to result in some team members refusing to honestly downgrade a poor performer.

### A FORM AND METHOD FOR ADMINISTERING PEER EVALUATIONS

What follows is the description of an approach to peer evaluation which has worked well in several classes for both authors. The form shown in Figure 1 was designed specifically for a simulation game. With some rather minor modifications it can be adapted to most any type of team exercise (E.g., see Figure 2.) The items on the form can be grouped into four dimensions of performance:

- a) commitment to the team (items 1, 2, and 5);
- b) effort put into the exercise (items 3 and 11);
- c) understanding of information needed to succeed in the exercise (items 6 and 7); and
- d) output/contribution measures (items 8, 9, and 10, and General Assessment items 1 and 2).

description of the process used for administering the peer evaluation follows. A single copy of the form is handed to each team relatively early in the exercise. In a simulation, for example, it should be given after the third decision. Each team is instructed to complete the form together as a group and to hand it in to the instructor. Each team member is required to sign off on the evaluation. This is done to assure the instructor that all team members were involved in the evaluation process. It does not guarantee that all members fully agree with the assessment. If the team members cannot resolve these problems on their own, they are advised to meet with the instructor to work through the disagreement. It is made very clear that the purpose of the form is to serve as a basis for communication among team members. It is not to be used by the instructor for

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assigning grades. Students are encouraged to air any grievance or dissatisfaction they may have with their teammates. The goal of this process is to have teams identify problems, real or perceived, and to determine a way to resolve them.

Given the unwillingness of students to confront their peers, the success of an attempt such as this is debatable, but it does provide a forced discussion on a variety of potential sources of conflict, and it does so in a setting where it is clear that no one's grade is being affected. The form is to be used expressly for improving team effectiveness.

From personal observation, it appears that, while students are not always comfortable with working through the form, they take its completion seriously and filling it out generates considerable discussion in some groups.

Depending upon the duration of the exercise, the procedure described above may be repeated multiple times during the course of the exercise. In fact, it is strongly recommended that it is used at least two times before the exercise is completed. This allows any "wayward" members to receive additional feedback from their teammates on their current contributions to the team. Repeated use of the form serves to reinforce either the positive steps taken by once poor performers, or to point out the continuing need for improvement. Upon completion of the exercise, a final peer evaluation is conducted. Here the traditional procedure is followed where each team member individually fills out, and confidentially hands in, a peer evaluation form. This final form can be the same one used earlier or one specially designed by the instructor. (One of the authors uses the modified form shown in Figure 2, and the other uses a more open-ended instrument.)

The process of using open as well as confidential evaluations mitigates some of the weaknesses of a one-time only, confidential evaluation. To the extent that the process does result in the airing and resolution of concerns, a more harmonious group is likely to result and group members are likely to be more satisfied with the exercise.

The combination of open and confidential evaluations also puts the instructor in a better position for assigning grades. If a team member has been evaluated poorly on one or more dimensions during the course of the exercise, and is subsequently panned in the confidential evaluation, the negative effect on his/her grade should not come as a shock. If, on the other hand, a student is evaluated positively throughout the exercise and then is ultimately rated poorly by his/her teammates, the instructor will probably not be inclined to penalize that student much if at all. Thus, not only does the instructor have more convincing evidence for the assigned grade, but a more just grade is likely to be given.

### SUMMARY

While neither the evaluation form nor the process for administering it is a dramatic breakthrough in teaching pedagogy, both authors have found the approach to evaluation described in this paper to be the most successful method used to date. In addition, several other faculty members who have tried the evaluation form have reported that it has been used with success. It is the hope of the authors that the form and the method of administration described in this paper will be helpful to others in their experiential exercises.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Faria, A. J. and John H. Dickman, LAPTOP: A Marketing Simulation, Business Publications, Inc., 1987.
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- [3] Jensen, Ronald L. and David J. Cherrington, The Business Management Laboratory, Business Publications, Inc., 1984.
- [4] Wolfe, Joseph and Thomas M. Box, "Team Cohesion Effects on Business Game Performance," in Lane Kelly and Patricia Sanders (editors), Developments in Business Simulation and Experiential Exercises, Vol. 14 (1987), pp. 250-255.

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FIGURE 1  
PEER EVALUATION  
JOINT ASSESSMENT

## INSTRUCTIONS:

This is a joint assessment. You are required, as a group, to reach a census on the rating of each member of your group on each of the measures below. Place each individual's name or initials in the appropriate space associated with the group's perception of his or her performance for that item. It is possible to have more than one name or initial in any space.

	Very Poor 1	2	Adequate 3	4	Superior 5
<b>Specific Assessment</b>					
1. Availability for group meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Attendance at scheduled group meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Willingness to accept tasks and follow through	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Preparation for group meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Commitment to group cohesiveness/harmony	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Understanding of rules and inter-relationships of the simulation	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Understanding of basic business functions (e.g., accounting and finance, marketing, operations)	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Facilitation of timely completion of tasks	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Practicality of suggested courses of action.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Creativity of suggested ideas	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Comments regarding above items:

	Very Poor 1	2	Adequate 3	4	Superior 5
<b>General Assessment</b>					
1. Overall quality of input	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Overall quantity of input	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Signoffs: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_

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**FIGURE 2**  
**PEER EVALUATION**

**INSTRUCTIONS:**

Place each individual's name in the space associated with your perception of his or her performance for that item. It is possible to have more than one name in any space. **INCLUDE YOURSELF!**

	Very Poor 1	2	Adequate 3	4	Superior 5
<b>Specific Assessment</b>					
1. Availability for group meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2. Attendance at scheduled group meetings	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3. Commitment to group cohesiveness/harmony	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4. Willingness to accept tasks and follow through	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5. Understanding of what needed to be done	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6. Practicality of suggested courses of action.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7. Creativity of suggested ideas	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8. Demonstrated leadership in group	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9. Timely completion of tasks	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10. Quality of work	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11. Quantity of work	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12. Comments regarding above items:					

State the proportion of work contributed by each member of your group (including yourself).

**Example:**

a. Smith 20%  
b. Jones 40%  
c. Johnson 30%  
d. Hermulka 10%

Name	%
a. _____	_____
b. _____	_____
c. _____	_____
d. _____	_____