

DEVELOPMENT OF A NEW PERFORMANCE EVALUATION INSTURMENT FOR THE URBANDALE FIRE DEPARTMENT

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Appendices Not Included. Please visit the Learning Resource Center on the Web at <http://www.lrc.dhs.gov/> to learn how to obtain this report in its entirety through Interlibrary Loan.

ABSTRACT

The problem was that members were dissatisfied with the performance evaluation system used by the Urbandale Fire Department. The purpose of this research was to identify solutions that would increase the satisfaction of the members of the department with a performance evaluation system.

A combination of action and evaluative research was used to answer the following questions:

1. Are the members of the Urbandale Fire Department satisfied with the current performance evaluation system?
2. What are the performance items that members of the Urbandale Fire Department feel should be measured?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting 360-degree evaluations?
4. Would members of the Urbandale Fire Department be interested in participating in a 360-degree performance evaluation system?

The questions were answered using surveys that were completed by members of the department and by conducting a literature review to review what others had identified regarding performance evaluations.

The results of the research identified that members of our department are not satisfied with the current evaluation system. Members identified items that they felt should be included and deleted from the current system. Members also concluded that they would be interested in participating in 360-degree evaluations.

The recommendations of this research are that the revised evaluation form be implemented. A committee of department members should be formed to pilot test a 360-degree evaluation system using volunteers representing each rank. That committee should explore the advantages, disadvantages and procedures for implementing a 360° evaluation system and that information should be presented to the membership before a new system is adopted. This 360° evaluation system should be used for personal development and not be tied to compensation or promotions. All department members

should receive training on any evaluation system to assure that the process is valuable to the members and the organization.

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INTRODUCTION

The Urbandale Fire Department instituted a performance evaluation system in 1998. The problem was that members were dissatisfied with the performance evaluation system used by the Urbandale Fire Department. Since the program began, there have been numerous complaints regarding the amount of time spent completing the evaluation process and complaints involving the items on the evaluation form. The purpose of this research was to identify solutions that would increase the satisfaction of the members of the department with a performance evaluation system. For this research project, a combination of action and evaluative research was used to answer the following four questions:

1. Are the members of the Urbandale Fire Department satisfied with the current performance evaluation system?
2. What are the performance items that members of the Urbandale Fire Department feel should be measured?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting 360-degree evaluations?
4. Would members of the Urbandale Fire Department be interested in participating in a 360-degree performance evaluation system?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Urbandale Fire Department is a combination department with a paid per call staff of 43 members. In February of 1998, the city of Urbandale hired the first full-time fire chief. Up to that point, there had been no full-time staff support for the department. In July of 2000, the City Council approved the funding of two additional full-time positions. A Paramedic/Inspector and a Training Officer were hired in September 2000. The department response count was more than 1,600 calls in 1999 and is expected to exceed 1,800 in 2000 (Urbandale Fire Department, 2000).

Urbandale is the largest city in the State of Iowa that is served by a volunteer department. Although the department is considered volunteer, members of the department are compensated when they are attending in-house training, assisting with tours, special assignments and are on all calls.

The department provides advanced life support ambulance service, fire suppression and related services. Customers are not billed for ambulance service provided by the Urbandale Fire Department, and all services are financed through property tax.

When the full-time chief was hired in 1998, he was asked to professionalize the department. One of the items that were identified by the chief was that there was very little accountability for the work that was being performed in the department. A performance evaluation system was initiated for members of the department and the department began a customer service survey to evaluate the performance of the department as a whole. Prior to 1998 there was no evaluation system.

Some of the members felt that there was no need to conduct performance evaluations and some members were very supportive of the performance evaluation system. Conducting the performance evaluation required more time from the members of the department. Both the officers conducting the evaluation and the members being evaluated had already seen an increase in the amount of time required to be a member of the department. In 2000, there was an increase in the number of hours averaged per month performing duties for the department. Members averaged 53 hours per month in 2000, up from 49 in 1999 (Urbandale Fire Department, 2000). Very little of the increase in hours per month was contributed to performance evaluations. Most of the increase was due to increased training and an increase in calls for service (Urbandale Fire Department, 2000). The department had seen a decrease in membership since 1998. One of the contributing factors was the amount of time required to be a member of the department.

There was a form of 360° evaluation implemented in 1999. The chief of the department implemented a “Chief’s Report Card” (Appendix A) intended to allow the officers to independently evaluate the job performance of the chief. The report card was given out once a year and the results were compiled and shared with the officer group. Additionally, the chief developed a plan for improvement and a copy was provided to all the officers.

The findings of this research will enable the department to customize a performance evaluation system to meet the needs and desires of the members of the

department to assure that they feel that they are getting the maximum return on their investment of time spent in service for the department.

The research originated as a result of attendance of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy by this researcher. It was during the class, Executive Leadership, that the idea for this research was formed. The idea of this research was explored in several units of the course text, including Unit 7, Using Feedback.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review was conducted to summarize what other others had identified as being important for the performance evaluation process. The procedure used for this research included a computer search for literature in the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center, at the Urbandale Community Library and an extensive search using the Internet.

There were numerous books, articles and reports relating to performance evaluations. One of the themes identified in the Literature Review was that there is a need to conduct performance evaluations. One reference stated that performance evaluations met a basic need of employees to understand where they stand with their supervisor (Petree, 1995). This thought was echoed in several books and articles. Employees may not identify shortcomings and improvement opportunities without performance evaluations that reveal their supervisor's opinion of the work that the employee performs (Carter & Rausch, 1989). As identified in an article by Laford (1998), items had been identified that firefighters want from their supervisors. Two of those items identified were: the need for the supervisor to identify the performance he or she wanted from the employee, and the need for the employee to receive feedback on how he or she did in respect to that performance. This can be accomplished only when there is some type of feedback system (Laford).

Many of the items reviewed stated that the performance evaluation was good for the employee as a means to identify plans for work improvement (Goodson & Sneed, 1999), and others suggested that performance evaluations are a necessary tool should

there be a need to document unacceptable performance in the event disciplinary action becomes necessary (Stipp, 1999).

As identified in his research, Stipp (1999) concluded that performance evaluations could result in both positive and negative effects. According to Sachs (1992), there are ten benefits of productive performance evaluations:

1. Employees learn of their strengths and weaknesses
2. New goals and objectives are agreed upon
3. Employees can be active participants in the evaluation process
4. The relationships between the supervisor and the employee is moved to an adult-adult level
5. Work teams may be restructured for maximum efficiency
6. Employees renew their interest in being part of the organization
7. Training needs are identified
8. Time is devoted to discussing the quality of work without regard to money issues
9. The supervisor becomes more comfortable with conducting evaluations
10. Employees feel that they are taken seriously as individuals and that the supervisor is concerned about their needs and goals.

Not all of the articles on performance evaluations touted the use of performance evaluations. Performance evaluations can also have negative results. Evaluations that are not objective, lack specific comments and that may appear unfair to the person receiving the evaluation can cause the process to fail (Bacal & Associates, 1999). One of the items that must be evaluated in a performance evaluation system is the amount of time and effort that management expends to establish and maintain a good performance evaluation system (Gratz, 1989).

The evaluators should be well trained in the evaluation process to avoid the completing evaluations that are too positive or too critical (Thaxon, 1999). It was identified by Grantz (1989), that the evaluation system should be specifically designed for the fire department and not merely a citywide performance evaluation system.

There was a great deal of information located on the implementation and use of 360° performance evaluations. Some literature refers to this process as 360-degree

appraisals while others refer to it as 360° feedback. 360° feedback is a method of performance evaluations using more than just the supervisor to obtain feedback on an individual's performance (Nardoni Associates, 1997). Many believe this system to provide a broader, more accurate view of employee job performance (Kirksey, Milliman, Norman, Powell, & Zawacki, 1994). In the 360° system, groups of people, internal and external customers, supervisors, subordinates and representatives from other departments who work with the individual being rated on a regular basis form a jury. It is felt that this jury can provide better insight to an employee's job performance than the traditional judge or evaluator. This is more likely to lead to true measure of effective job performance versus someone who does well when the boss is watching (Kirksey, et al., 1994). As a general rule, between five and ten raters are used to provide perspective on an employee. The results of the evaluation are summarized and provided to the employee who then develops a plan, with his or her supervisor on how to improve performance. The results can be provided anonymously or the evaluator can be identified. The trend to use 360° evaluations is still relatively new. In 1997, a survey found that 8 percent of major companies were using 360° evaluations (DeBare, 1997). While some may feel that is the latest management fad, the survey cited by DeBare, revealed that 69 percent of the companies surveyed planned on implementing some type of 360° system in the next 3 years.

The 360° evaluation has both advantages and disadvantages. Many employees feel that feedback from their peers is much more valuable and more fair than the traditional performance evaluations (Kirksey et al., 1994). Other articles suggest that because of the strong employee involvement, 360° evaluations may have the strongest impact on behavior and performance (Toolpack Consulting, 2001). Other advantages are that 360° evaluations provide a comprehensive view of employee performance, increases the creditability of the performance appraisal, the feedback of the peers enhances employee self-development and it increases accountability of employees to their customers. 360° evaluations can reveal the employee who does well when the boss is watching but may not do well when working with co-workers or is unsupervised.

Additionally, 360° evaluations give the employee the opportunity to see if customers perceive their actions as intended (Kirksey et al., 1994).

Disadvantages were listed as the process is time consuming and administratively complex, the process can be intimidating to some employees and the process requires training and significant change effort to be effective (Kirksey et al., 1994). Most of the literature reviewed commented on the extensive amount of time needed to make the 360° evaluation program successful. DeBare (1997) found that one evaluator was spending 40 to 45 minutes on each 360° evaluation.

It was also suggested that the 360° evaluations should be used for employee development only and should not be used to make compensation decisions (Lassiter, 1997). Lassiter identified an additional disadvantage to using 360° evaluations as performance appraisals because there is an increased exposure to liability. 360° feedback has not been tested or validated as a method for performance feedback.

These findings helped provide the direction of this research. Members can now be informed of the advantages and disadvantages of conducting performance evaluations and the advantages and disadvantages of conducting 360° performance evaluations. Members may be excited about the opportunity to participate in 360° evaluations but they should fully realize how much time is involved to make the system work. The amount of time needed to perform effective evaluations is an area that had been previously identified within our department as being problematic.

PROCEDURES

The research was a combination of action and evaluative research methodology. The first step in this process was to evaluate what others had written about the evaluation process. Most of this research was done in the form of a literature review. The literature review included a computer search for literature in the National Fire Academy Learning Resource Center, at the Urbandale Community Library, and an extensive search using the Internet. Additionally, evaluations forms (Appendix B) that other cities were using were reviewed to provide a list of items that are being measured by other communities that were not common to the current evaluation form of the Urbandale Fire Department. These evaluation forms were requested from the Assistant City Manager of the City of

Urbandale as she was working on reviewing the City of Urbandale's evaluation process and had previously requested a copy of evaluations from several cities. This provided direction on how others are measuring performance.

The current process of measuring performance in the Urbandale Fire Department was also reviewed (Appendix C). The current evaluation form was reviewed and compared to what others were using. As part of that review, a survey was created (Appendix D) to evaluate what the members of our department felt about the current evaluation process and evaluation form. The survey consisted of two pages and members were asked their opinions on several statements and they were asked to rate their responses as strongly disagree, disagree, no opinion, agree, or strongly agree. One page asked questions regarding our current evaluation system and page two asked questions regarding the 360° evaluation process. Questions regarding the current evaluation system covered the member's opinion of the current evaluation system and asked them if they felt the current evaluation system should be changed. Questions regarding 360° evaluations asked if the members felt that 360° evaluations should be used for officers and what officers should receive the 360° evaluations, if they would be willing to participate in 360° evaluations on officers and on their own job performance. On both surveys, members were asked to identify themselves only as an officer or non-officer. This will allow us to compare the answers of these two groups.

There was a place for comments below each question. The intent of asking for comments on the survey was so that members could make specific comments on what items the members would like added, deleted or changed on the current evaluation system.

The second step in this research was to develop a list of items (Appendix E) that are currently on our evaluation form and asked members what their opinion were of those items. Members were asked to mark those items as either keep or delete. Members were then asked to rate some items that were found on other evaluations forms. They were again asked to rate them as include, do not include, and or include for officers only.

The surveys were given out at weekly training sessions, which are conducted on Tuesday nights. The surveys were unannounced prior to the training session. The first survey (Appendix D) was given to 39 members on a Tuesday night training session and

38 surveys were returned. The second survey (Appendix E) was given out two weeks later to 35 members with 33 surveys completed and returned. Both surveys prompted participants to include comments in the space provided or on the back of the form.

The information from the surveys were tallied and a recommendation was developed based on the desires of the members of the department to change the evaluation system to meet the needs of those members thus making the evaluation process more meaningful to the members.

Limitations

There were limitations with this project. Not all members had the opportunity to participate in the surveys. Members who were not at the Tuesday night training session did not have an opportunity to complete the survey. Other limitations included the reviewing of the evaluations form used by other communities. While they were general evaluation forms, they were not specific to the fire department and it was not known if those communities submitting evaluations forms had forms specific to the fire department.

Another limitation is the member's mindset on participating in the evaluation of the current evaluation process. Members were asked to add comments on each survey question in the first survey and were given a question where they were asked directly what they would like to see added, deleted, or changed in the current system. Members did not take advantage of the opportunity as there were very few written comments received. Members may be apathetic towards the evaluation process.

RESULTS

This research allowed us to answer the following questions:

1. Are the members of the Urbandale Fire Department satisfied with the current performance evaluation system?
2. What are the performance items that members of the Urbandale Fire Department feel should be measured?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of conducting 360-degree evaluations?

4. Would members of the Urbandale Fire Department be interested in participating in a 360-degree performance evaluation system?

Research Question 1. It was important to identify if the members of the department were satisfied with the current evaluation system. There were eight questions on the survey that were intended to gauge the member's satisfaction with the current system. Question three was the most direct question for gauging the member's satisfaction with the current evaluation system. This question gave the member the opportunity to agree or disagree with the statement, "I am satisfied with the current employee evaluation system" (Appendix D). The answer to research question number one, "Are the members of the Urbandale Fire Department satisfied with the current performance evaluation system?" is that of those having an opinion, slightly more of the members are not satisfied than those who are satisfied. Of the 37 responses, 41 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, 38 percent agreed with the statement, and 8 or 22 percent had no opinion. One person did not respond to the statement. Breaking that down to see if there was a difference between officers and non-officers reveals that there is a difference between these two groups. Eight or 66 percent of the officers disagreed with the statement, 1 strongly disagreed, and 1 had no opinion. Of the non-officers, 6 or 24 percent of those responding disagreed, 12 or 48 percent of the responses agreed with the statement, 7 had no opinion and 1 did not respond. Overall, there was slight trend towards disagreeing with the statement with 41 percent disagreeing, 38 percent agreeing with the statement and 21 percent having no opinion.

The majority of the members of the department feel that there is a need to perform employee evaluations with 84.2 percent disagreeing with the statement number 2, "There is no need to perform employee evaluations in our department" (Appendix D). Only 13.1 percent either agreed or strongly agreed. Following up on that statement is statement number four, "Performance evaluations are helpful to me" (Appendix D). Of the responses to this statement, 76.3 percent or 29 of the responses agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. 3 respondents had no opinion and 6 or 15.7 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Statements five and six related to measuring the department's performance and not that of individuals. Statement five, "I feel the department's performance should be

measured, not individuals” (Appendix D), had 73.6 or 28 respondents who disagreed or strongly disagreed. Statement six followed up with this statement by asking the respondents their opinion of the statement, “I consider the customer service surveys to be an adequate measurement of departmental performance” (Appendix D). More of the members agreed with this statement than disagreed. 43 percent or 16 of the 37 of the responses agreed with the statement, 27 percent or 10 of the 38 responses disagreed, and 30 percent had no opinion. One person did not respond to this statement.

Statements seven and eight were regarding the respondent’s opinion regarding the content of the current evaluation system. Statement seven was, “I would like to see the content of the current evaluation system changed” (Appendix D). Respondents that agreed that with the statement accounted for 47 percent of the responses. There was an equal amount of responses that either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement as there was that had no opinion. The results were that 47 percent would like to see the system changes, 26 percent have no opinion, and 26 percent would not like to see the system changed. Question number eight asked the members what area in the current system that they would like to see changed. Responses to that question and they are included in Appendix F.

Statement number one pertained to how the respondent felt towards the current evaluation system informing the member of what the member’s supervisor thinks of their job performance. 66 percent of the responses agreed that the current evaluation system is effective in informing the member of what their supervisor thinks of their job performance, 11 respondents or 29 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement and 2 respondents had no opinion.

Statement 13 was, “During the evaluation process, I am given the opportunity to discuss my job performance” (Appendix D). 87 percent or 33 of the responses agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 1 respondent had no opinion and 3 disagreed.

There was a place for comments below each question. The intent of asking for comments on the survey was so that members could make specific comments on what items the members would like to add, delete or change to the current evaluation system. There were several comments received. Those written comments can be seen in Appendix F.

Statements on the second page of the survey primarily dealt with the 360° evaluation system. Statement nine was, “I would like to see the officers of our department receive 360-degree performance evaluations” (Appendix D). Of the responses, 33 or 87 percent of the responses agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. There were three respondents that had no opinion and two responses that disagreed with this statement. This question was also broke down to determine if there was a difference between the officer’s responses versus the non-officers. The officers agree or strongly agreed with the statement at a rate of 75 percent, 2 or 16 percent of the officers disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement and one had no opinion. Of the non-officers, 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement and 2 respondents had no opinion.

Statement ten was designed to determine what the members felt the 360° evaluations should be used for. The statement was, “360-degree evaluations should be used to determine raises and promotions” (Appendix D). The greatest number of responses, 19 or 51 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. Of the other responses to this statement, 10 or 27 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed, and 8 responses or 22 percent had no opinion and one person did not respond to this statement.

The final statement on the first survey pertained to whom the members would like to see 360-degree evaluation performed on. Table 1 shows the number of responses for each position in the department.

Table 1

Number of the members who would like to see 360° performance evaluations on the following positions

<u>Position</u>	<u>Number of people</u>
Fire Chief	14
Assistant Chiefs	19
Captains	19
Lieutenant	19
All members	30

Research Question 2. Research question two, “What are the performance items that members of the Urbandale Fire Department feel should be measured?” was answered in the second survey (Appendix E). The second survey was designed to measure the member’s feelings on the items on the current evaluation system as well as what the

member feels should be included on an evaluation system. Members were asked to decide what items should be deleted off of the current evaluation form and what items should be maintained. Table 2 shows the members did not have a clear performance item that they would like to have deleted.

Table 2

Items on the current evaluation form that members wanted to keep or to delete

<u>Performance Item</u>	<u># wishing to keep</u>	<u># wishing to delete</u>
Job Knowledge	32	1
Job Interest	26	4
Initiative	28	3
Demeanor	26	6
Interpersonal Relations	28	2
Dependability	27	5
Adaptability	21	9
Communications	25	6

Part two of the second survey provided the respondents with a list of performance items that were included in other community's performance evaluations. Respondents were asked to pick the performance items that they would like to see included in an evaluation for the Urbandale Fire Department. They were also asked to note if any items that they would like to see included should be included for officers only. Table 3 shows the performance items that received the highest votes to include.

Table 3

Performance items members would like to see included

<u>Performance Item</u>	<u>Number of Votes</u>	<u>Include for Officers only</u>
Teamwork	26	2
Customer Service	25	3
Safety/respect for property	25	3
Professional Conduct	24	8
Decision Making	13	11

Research Question 3. The third question that was answered in this research was research question number three, "What are the advantages and disadvantages of

conducting 360-degree evaluations?” A list of advantages and disadvantages was compiled from the literature review. Many of the items listed as advantages were common to several of the articles. In the article by Toolpack Consulting (2001), several items were listed as having been identified as advantages of a 360° evaluations system.

They are:

- 360° evaluations are the most comprehensive appraisal method
- 360° evaluations provides the opportunity for the employee to see how he or she is viewed by others
- 360° evaluations provide the strongest impact on behavior and performance
- 360° evaluations have a high level of employee involvement and creditability
- 360° evaluations may greatly increase communications

In the work of Kirksey et al. (1994), several other items were discussed. Listed as advantages of 360° evaluations were:

- 360° evaluations provide a more comprehensive view of employee performance
- 360° evaluations increase creditability of performance appraisals
- 360° evaluations provide feedback from peers that enhances employee self-development
- 360° evaluations increase accountability of employees to their customers

There were several advantages that were listed that were common in most of the literature reviewed. In one article, DeBare (1997) reported that companies using 360° evaluations have reported an increase in productivity.

Potential disadvantages of 360° evaluations were also identified. The item that appeared most often as a disadvantage was the amount of time that 360° evaluations required. Items listed by Kirksey et al. (1994), were:

- 360° evaluations are time consuming and more administratively complex
- Extensive giving and receiving of feedback can be intimidating to some employees

- 360° evaluations require training and significant change effort to work effectively

Other disadvantages identified by DeBare (1997), were a risk of employees banding together to assure that they each receive a positive evaluation, and the risk that employee's friends may be reluctant to say something negative about the person being evaluated if they feel a poor evaluation may jeopardize a raise.

Research Question 4. The fourth and final research question that was answered in this research was, "Would members of the Urbandale Fire Department be interested in participating in a 360-degree performance evaluation system?" This question was answered in the first survey. Questions 11 and 12 asked the member if he or she would be willing to participate in a 360-degree evaluation on their own job performance and that of their supervisor. Statement 11 was designed to measure the member's willingness to participate in 360° evaluations on their own job performance. There was one respondent who had no opinion, 92 percent agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I would be willing to participate in a 360-degree performance evaluation on my job performance" (Appendix D). Five percent disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Statement 12 was designed to measure the member's willingness to participate in the 360° evaluation process on the member's supervisor. Of the responses received, 89.4 percent of the responses agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, "I would be willing to participate in a 360-degree performance evaluation on my supervisor" (Appendix D). Two respondents had no opinion and two disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Action research required that a final product be produced. In this research, that final product is a revised evaluation form. Based on the responses to the surveys, the following changes were made to the evaluation form:

1. The performance item, Adaptability, was deleted from the current form and was replaced with the category Teamwork.
2. The performance item, Leadership was combined with the item, Initiative.
3. The performance item, Safety was added to the evaluation form.

4. Categories for supervisor only were included.
5. The numerical rating scale was expanded from 0 – 5 to 0 – 15.
6. The entire evaluation form was redesigned.

The revised evaluation form is included as Appendix G.

DISCUSSION

The results of the surveys were consistent with the information that had been identified in the literature review as others discussed evaluations. As identified by Petree (1995), wanting to know where one stands with one's supervisor may be a basic need of employees. Members of the Urbandale Fire Department seem to share that view. The vast majority of members felt that there was a need to perform employee evaluations in our department. Slightly over 84 percent of the members feel that there is a need to perform evaluations while only 13 percent of those surveyed agreed with that there was no need to perform evaluations. This seems to support Laford's (1998) contention that firefighters do want feedback on how they are performing.

Members completing the survey were not as convinced that the current performance evaluations are useful to them. Only 76 percent of those responding felt that performance evaluations were helpful to them. I would have thought this number might have been higher and it is not clear if the respondent's answer was an indication of being dissatisfied with the current system or with any evaluation system. Even with this, the results of the survey seem to support the information identified by Laford (1998), that showed that firefighters want feedback from their supervisors.

Only 15 percent of the respondents felt that the department's performance should be measured and not that of the individuals that make up the department. This would suggest that 84 percent of the respondents felt that there is a need to measure individual performance. This is consistent with other questions in the survey that indicate that members do feel that performance evaluations are useful.

The indication is that members do want to be evaluated because they feel it is useful. Members want to know how they are doing and perhaps as identified by Goodson & Sneed (1999), this is so they can improve performance. As identified in his research, Stipp (1999), identified the need to document unacceptable performance so that if

disciplinary action becomes necessary, there will be a paper trail. Members of the department may see evaluations as a protection mechanism protecting them from being unjustly disciplined.

Having established that the members of the Urbandale Fire Department see the need to have performance evaluations, the next questions was, did we need to change the current system of evaluations? Question seven in survey number one asked the participants to agree or disagree with the statement, “I would like to see the content of the current evaluation system changed” (Appendix D). The results were that 47 percent would like to see the system changes, 26 percent have no opinion, and 26 percent would not like to see the system changed. While there was almost twice the number of responses that indicated that would like to see the system changed, the large number of respondents that had no opinion and obviously were not opposed to changing the system. It is felt that enough responses were positive to proceed with changing the evaluation system.

It is the interpretation of this researcher that performance evaluations are useful tools for the fire service and specifically, the Urbandale Fire Department. While the survey did not ask why members of the Urbandale Fire Department wanted to be a part of evaluations, it is felt that the members of our department share the views identified by Sachs (1992), that states the advantages to conducting performance evaluations. It also can be deduced from the results of the survey that the members of the Urbandale Fire Department would like to see the current evaluation system used by the Urbandale Fire Department changed. What those changes would be is not clear. Participants of the survey were asked to list the items that they would like to see added or deleted. The results to that question are shown in Table 2. Most participants listed that they wanted to keep most of the performance items included in the current evaluation system. In fact, the performance item receiving the lowest number of choices to keep in the current evaluation was the performance item, Adaptability. This item was marked as keep by 21 or 70 percent of the respondents. Responses marking this item as delete were 9 or 30 percent of the responses. All of the other performance items from our current evaluation system received a higher number of marks in the keep category. From this response, it is not clear what participants want changed. In a previous question, it was clear that they wanted to change the current system.

Given a list of items not included in our current evaluation but used in other evaluations, participants were asked to list items to be included in our evaluation system. The top five responses are list in Table 3. There were no items that received votes by all respondents. Of those items identified as include, only three received more votes than the lowest item on the “keep” list from the current evaluation. The items, Teamwork, Customer Service, and Safety/respect for property, all received more votes than Adaptability.

The advantages of performing 360° evaluations are impressive. The advantages seem to be in the best interest of both the organization and the employees. As listed by Kirksey et al. (1994), the 360° system seems to give a more accurate view of the employee’s job performance. This is very useful to the organization. Getting a broader view of employee performance can identify people who seem to do well to their supervisor but have problem areas with subordinates, co-workers and or customers. It is further suggested Toolpack Consulting (2001), that 360° evaluations offer the strongest impact on changing behavior and performance. This is a powerful argument for the organization to support 360°performance evaluations.

The advantages are not just for the organization but for the employee as well. As identified by Kirksey et al. (1994), employees feel that 360° performance evaluations are fairer than traditional evaluations. Employees seem to like the involvement with the process and find the feedback from several people to be a true picture of job performance Toolpack Consulting (2001).

While there are advantages, and based on the survey, our members would like to participate in 360° evaluations, there are drawbacks. The most serious disadvantage identified to performing 360° evaluations was the amount of time spent completing the process. While this is only one item of those listed as a disadvantage, it is very big in our department. Members are constantly trying to identify ways to save time and this one item may well threaten all of the advantages of conducting 360° evaluations. While most of our members stated they would like to participate in 360° evaluations, this researcher is not sure if there is an understanding of the time involved. This could be a serious threat to the success of an evaluation process in a paid per call department. Additionally, as identified by Lassiter (1997), there is an increased liability risk when using the 360°

evaluations. While there is a risk of unconscious bias in the traditional evaluator process, there is a proportionate expansion of that risk when more evaluators are used such as in the 360° evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research information gathered during this research project, the following five recommendations are made.

Recommendation #1. The revised performance evaluation form should be implemented to continue traditional, non 360-degree evaluations. Members should receive the revised form for review immediately.

Recommendation #2. Following the next evaluation period, a survey should be conducted to gauge the member's satisfaction with the revised form. Revisions should be considered based on member satisfaction.

Recommendation #3. A committee of department members should be formed to pilot test a 360-degree evaluation using the revised form. Volunteers representing each rank in the department including the Fire Chief should be solicited for the pilot testing of the 360-degree evaluation. This committee should explore the advantages, disadvantages and procedures for implementing a 360° evaluation system and that information should be presented to the membership before a new system is adopted. Member buy-in and acceptance are a critical component to the success of a 360-degree evaluation and they must have a complete understanding of the advantages, disadvantages and time involved in completing the 360-degree evaluation.

Recommendation #4. If a 360-degree evaluation system is adopted, it should be used for personal development and not be used to determine compensation or promotions.

Recommendation #5. Department members and supervisors should receive training on the existing or any new evaluation system to assure that the process is valuable to the members and the organization.

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