**ASSESSMENT OF THE NILES FIRE DEPARTMENT
EMPLOYEE EVALUATION SYSTEM**

EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP

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Appendices J through L 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 examined was a union contract for Niles Fire Department (NFD) personnel is being negotiated for the first time. Contract items to be negotiated include a disciplinary policy, a promotional policy, a personnel file policy, and a compensation policy. Each of these items can be impacted by employee evaluations. It is unknown whether the present NFD employee evaluation system is appropriate for use in these areas.

The purpose of this research project was to assess the present NFD employee evaluation system in light of the items that need to be negotiated in collective bargaining. Four research questions were developed in an attempt to assist the author in accomplishing the purpose of this project. Descriptive and evaluative research was used to answer these research questions:

1.   What are the necessary components of an effective employee evaluation system?

2.   How do other fire departments handle the employee evaluation process?

3.   What are the impressions of NFD personnel regarding employee evaluations?

4.   What issues, if any, need to be considered as a result of contract negotiations in the modification of the present NFD employee evaluation system?

The procedures employed to complete this research included a review of applicable literature and questionnaires received from 113 fire departments. Finally, a comprehensive questionnaire was completed by NFD personnel.

The results of this research indicated that NFD personnel feel that the present employee evaluation process is lacking in a number of areas. However NFD personnel also indicated that, when properly designed and administered, evaluations could be beneficial.

The recommendations that resulted from this research project included a mandate that management definitively decide and communicate to all personnel that the main objective for

evaluations is to foster employee growth and development. In order to accomplish this objective

specific actions were recommended such as reverse evaluations, anonymity of subordinate

evaluators, a practice to keep evaluation results confidential, and further extensive research into

employee evaluation forms and formats.

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INTRODUCTION

The problem is a union contract for Niles Fire Department (NFD) personnel is being negotiated for the first time. Contract items to be negotiated include a disciplinary policy, a promotional policy, a personnel file policy, and a compensation policy. Each of these items can be impacted by employee evaluations. It is unknown whether the present NFD employee evaluation system is appropriate for use in these areas.

Prior to the unionization of NFD line personnel, management had the right to unilaterally alter existing policies. However, once the vote to unionize the NFD was ratified by the Illinois Labor Relations Board in April of 2001, management and labor are now required by law to collectively bargain certain conditions of employment. Four specific issues that must be negotiated are a disciplinary policy, a promotional policy, a compensation policy, and a policy detailing procedures regarding personal employment records. Employee evaluations can have a varying degree of influence on each of these items.

According to Halas (1998) "well designed, properly used appraisal system is essential for effective management, well-being, and survival of today's emergency organizations." (p. 11). Furthermore, employee evaluation system can vary substantially between different fire departments.

Clearly, it is critically important for management to address to issue of employee evaluations. Therefore, the purpose of this research project is to assess the present NFD employee evaluation system in light of the items that need to be negotiated in collective bargaining.

Four research questions were developed in an attempt to assist the author in accomplishing the purpose of this project. Descriptive and evaluative research will be used to

answer these research questions:

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modification of the present NFD employee evaluation system?

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

The Village of Niles Fire Department provides a multitude of services to a community of
30,068 people. These services include fire prevention, fire suppression, fire investigation,
emergency medical treatment and transport, special rescue, hazardous materials response, and
public education. When at full strength, the department consists of 52 sworn personnel. Of the 52
sworn personnel 48, equally divided between three platoons, are assigned to a 24/48 shift
schedule. This includes three District Chiefs, nine Lieutenants, nine Fire Apparatus Engineers,
and 27 Firefighter/Paramedics. The remaining four sworn personnel are the Fire Chief, the
Deputy Fire Chief, and two Fire Inspectors assigned to the Fire Prevention Bureau. These
individuals work an 8/40 work schedule. The department operates two engines, two ambulances,
and one aerial ladder out of two stations.

The members of the bargaining unit consist of the nine Lieutenants, nine Fire Apparatus
Engineers, and 27 Firefighter/Paramedics. Under the current performance evaluation system,
each of the Lieutenants, Fire Apparatus Engineers, and Firefighter/Paramedics are evaluated
once per year. Each District Chief evaluates the three Lieutenants assigned to their platoon using
the form in Appendix J. Each Lieutenant, in turn, evaluates the one Fire Apparatus Engineer and

three Firefighter/Paramedics assigned to their company using the form in Appendix K and L respectfully.

Once the evaluator has completed the appropriate form, a conference between the evaluator and evaluatee is held. The intent of this conference is to discuss the appraisal. The evaluation forms are then sent, through the chain of command, to the Chief of the Department.

In April of 2001, the members of the NFD voted to unionize the line personnel of the department with Teamsters Local 726. Prior to this unionization, village officials were able to make unilateral adjustments to any existing practice including the performance evaluation process. However, Illinois labor law requires that the village now must collectively bargain policies relating to wages and working conditions. Furthermore, any future changes to the resulting policy will need to be bargained between labor and management. For this reason alone, it is imperative that management decide upon objectives for the performance evaluation process.

This research project is being conducted in accordance with the applied research requirement of the Executive Leadership (EL) class in the National Fire Academy's Executive Fire Officer Program. The topic being addressed relates directly to a segment of the course. Specifically, on page 6-11 of the Student Manual for the Executive Leadership course, the topic of assessing employee performance was detailed. Additionally, one of the United States Fire Administration's operational objectives is to respond to emergent issues in a timely manner. Clearly the topic of employee evaluations is an issue that needs to be addressed within the NFD to allow for effective, efficient future operations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review was to gather and examine applicable information

regarding employee evaluation systems. More specifically, particular emphasis was placed on scrutinizing what the literature indicated were the necessary components of an effective employee evaluation system.

Ramey and Sniffen (1991) stated "performance reviews should provide employees with feedback on their performance. It should offer an opportunity for them to discuss ways of improving their performance and to discuss and establish future employment goals" (p. 145). Ramey and Sniffen further wrote that performance reviews can be utilized to identify a need for employee and/or department training. Finally, they indicated that there are many possible combinations and types of performance review processes. Which type would be best in a given organization depends to a certain extent on both management styles and the nature of the organization's employees.

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) wrote that effective performance management needs to have four components. The first component is simplicity. They cautioned against a system which makes the performance appraisal process too tedious and overly dependant on lengthy forms. The second component is frequent interaction between the manager and the employee. Specifically, Buckingham and Coffman indicated that the common practice of yearly evaluation meetings is far too infrequent. The third component is the session between manager and employee needs to be focused on future goals and strategies. The fourth and final component is self-tracking. The employee needs to be responsible to track their own performance.

Halas (1998) stated:

Largely the success or failure of performance evaluations in any organization will be dependent on the managerial philosophy under which it is established. This philosophy will guide the attitudes of supervisors, subordinates, and trainers toward the

evaluation process, and help to determine the skills needed for effective use of the system. (p. 11)

Solie (2002) wrote:

The tendency to rate others on the basis of personality rather than job performance remains an inherent problem in the performance-appraisal process. Far too often, the performance appraisal becomes a subjective exercise of meaningless personality assessment. Not that personality characteristics are unimportant in job performance – inherent traits and abilities do contribute to success or failure on the job – but this approach does little or nothing to improve job performance. (p. 8)

Laford (1998) advocated the grading of an employee's characteristics such as efficiency, reliability, and leadership. He stated that each of these characteristics needs to be defined. According to Laford, employee evaluations and performance assessments need to be done not only at an arbitrarily, pre-determined time interval but whenever warranted. He stated that there are four steps to formal performance evaluations. These steps are preparation, communication, agreement, and follow-up. Further he wrote that the evaluation should require the evaluator to list specific details about the evaluatee and how the evaluatee is doing in meeting pre-established goals. Finally, the form should conclude with offering the employee some guidance on future direction.

Laford also stated that the review process should consist of three components: self-appraisal, supervisor's appraisal and subordinate or peer appraisal. Laford wrote, in reference to the subordinate or peer appraisal, that this component of the process may very well provide some valuable insight into the supervisor's personal development.

Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) indicated that in a system that utilizes feedback solely for

developmental purposes the ownership of the findings rests with the person being evaluated. In a system that utilizes feedback for appraisal purposes, the ownership of the findings rests with the organization.

Lepsinger and Lucia, in regards to training evaluators, wrote:

The better people understand what to look for and how to record "critical incidents" (specific things the person said or did) that can be used as examples to support their ratings, the better the quality of the information that will be collected. (p. 66)

Lepsinger and Lucia further wrote:

When 360° feedback is used for development only, the organization may be able to settle for a list of behaviors and skills that have reasonable face validity and general support: "coaching" or "team-building", for instance. However, when the feedback is being used to determine performance ratings, the results and behaviors for which people are held accountable must be clear, unambiguous, specific, observable and agreed to by those who will be measured; everyone has to know exactly what "coaching" and "team-building" mean. (p. 70)

Lepsinger and Lucia cautioned that, particularly when the results of a 360° feedback process are going to be used for appraisal purposes, two procedural aspects are critical. The first aspect is that the organization needs to ensure that the utilized instrument accurately and reliably measures what it claims to measure. Furthermore, it is vital that what is being measured actually correlates with performance on the job. Secondly, if the organization wants and expects honest and accurate feedback, the anonymity of all the raters must be guaranteed.

Lawson (1990) detailed a performance appraisal process which consists of appraising each employee in the following factors:

- Ability to get along with others

- Acceptance of responsibility

- Attitude

- Ingenuity

- Initiative

- Job knowledge

- Judgment

- Promptness in completing assignments

- Quality of work

- Quantity of work

The evaluator rates each employee in the above factors as either unsatisfactory, good, very good, outstanding or superior. Additionally, each employee receives an overall appraisal of their performance. Finally, as part of the evaluation process, an evaluator is to indicate each employee's strong points, weak points, and any recommendations for improvement.

Luthy (1998) proposed that accurate, effective performance evaluations need to incorporate the following four categories:

- Core/job-specific attributes – this encompasses the qualities and behaviors common to successful job performance for employees at all levels of the organization.

- Technical knowledge and skills – this relates to the evaluatee's ability to use technical methods, procedures, and equipment associated with their particular job.

- Interpersonal characteristics and skills – this relates to the traits and qualities that facilitate communication, cooperation, and teamwork throughout the organization.

- Job-related goals, key objectives, and assignments – this allows for the identification of

goals, objectives, future assignments, and special projects that the evaluatee will be held accountable.

Luthy in summarizing his views wrote "after reviewing dozens of evaluation systems, this author believes that there must be an approach that allows clear evaluation based on desired attributes, necessary technical knowledge and skills, and accomplishment toward established objectives" (p. 5).

Dinkmeyer and Eckstein (1996) opined against linking salary adjustments to the results of evaluations when they wrote:

Beneficial use of the performance review places human resource development as its primary objective. When leaders view the performance appraisal as a significant tool that can help them improve their employees' performance, everyone benefits – the employee, the leader, the department, and the company. (p.105)

The literature indicated that the main objective of the evaluation process should be to improve employee performance and to encourage employee development. By establishing future goals and following up to determine the employee's progress towards achieving these goals, the likelihood of success is greatly increased.

An evaluation system should have simplicity as a key component. The literature indicated that frequent interaction between the evaluator and the evaluatee is more critical than any cumbersome labyrinthine of paperwork. Additionally, the literature review revealed the benefit of multi-source evaluations. If the purpose of these multi-source evaluations is for employee development only and not for performance ratings, the evaluation criteria can be more loosely defined. Additionally, the results of the evaluation should be seen solely by the evaluator and evaluatee. Finally, the literature detailed the factors by which an employee can be evaluated.

PROCEDURES

The purpose of this research project was to assess the present NFD employee evaluation system in light of the items that need to be negotiated in collective bargaining. Descriptive and evaluative research methodologies were utilized. The procedures employed to complete this research project consisted of a literature review and the use of questionnaires to determine how other fire departments structure their employee evaluation process. Finally, a detailed questionnaire was distributed to NFD personnel.

Literature Review

The literature review was initiated at the National Emergency Training Center's Learning Resource Center in March of 2002. Further literature searches were conducted, from April of 2002 through May of 2002, at the public libraries in Park Ridge, Illinois and Niles, Illinois. Additional literature was accessed at the Northwestern University Library in Evanston, Illinois. Finally, during that same time period, further information was acquired from both the researcher's personal library and the Niles Fire Department's library. Textbooks, journals, magazines and websites were examined during the research process. Pertinent sources were included in the Literature Review portion of this paper.

Employee Evaluation Process Feedback Forms

In order to examine employee evaluation processes of other fire departments, a questionnaire was developed. The intention of the questionnaire was to determine the specifics of each department's employee evaluation process. The original feedback form utilized (Appendix A) was distributed and collected from March 16, 2002 through March 19, 2002 at the National

Fire Academy in Emmitsburg, Maryland. The questionnaire was distributed to the following resident classes being held during the aforementioned time frame: Discovering the Road to High Risk Audiences, Executive Development, Executive Leadership, Advanced Leadership Issues in Emergency Medical Services, and Fire Arson Investigation. The results from this feedback form are detailed in Appendix G.

A second, similar questionnaire (Appendix D) was sent to fire departments that have been identified in preparation for contract negotiations as comparables to the NFD. These departments are Buffalo Grove FD, Des Plaines FD, Glenview FD, Highland Park FD, Morton Grove FD, Mount Prospect FD, Northbrook FD, North Maine FPD, Park Ridge FD, Prospect Heights FD, Rolling Meadows FD, Skokie FD, Wheeling FD, Wilmette FD, and Winnetka FD. The results from this feedback form are detailed in Appendix H.

The original questionnaire and the questionnaire sent to the comparable fire departments are nearly identical. The only revision made to the original questionnaire was to question 9. Based on comments from students at the National Fire Academy who completed the original feedback form, question 9 was misunderstood. To ensure that the answers received were accurate, this researcher verbally explained the intended meaning of question 9 to the respondents as they were answering the question. Prior to faxing out the questionnaire to the identified comparable fire departments question 9 was modified. This revised feedback form (Appendix D) was faxed, along with a fax cover sheet (Appendix B), and a cover letter (Appendix C), to 15 local fire departments.

The final feedback form employed (Appendix F) was created for use with NFD personnel. The form was distributed to all NFD District Chiefs, Lieutenants, and Firefighter/Paramedics. Of the 45 forms distributed, 30 were returned. The results from this

questionnaire are summarized in Appendix I.

The questionnaires utilized by this researcher were developed using, as a basis, the surveys employed by Strahan (1999) and Intartaglio (2000). Modifications and additions to these surveys were made by this researcher to arrive at the utilized format.

Assumptions

It has been assumed that the respondents to the survey understood each of the questions asked and were knowledgeable enough about their employee evaluation process to respond accurately. Additionally, it was assumed that the respondents were honest, thorough, and unbiased in their answers.

This researcher also made the assumption that the information obtained from the literature review was factual and applicable to the fire service. Much of the literature was written with a focus on private industry. Finally, it was also assumed that there can be some significant degree of transfer of the techniques and processes recommended for the private sector to the public sector.

Limitations

The current relationship between labor and management within the NFD is strained. It is beyond the scope of this research project to attempt to explain the reasons for the current state of affairs. However, because of the present situation within the department, this author was prevented from asking more probing questions in the questionnaire that was circulated.

The project was further limited by time constraints. The relatively limited amount of time allowed by the National Fire Academy standards coupled with this author's personal time

limitations restricted the extent of the research to the present scope.

Definitions

Evaluator. The person completing an evaluation.

Evaluatee. The person receiving an evaluation.

Rater. The person completing an evaluation.

Ratee. The person receiving an evaluation.

360° Evaluation. The employee completes a self-appraisal and is reviewed by

supervisors, peers, subordinates, and external third parties.

Multi-source Evaluation. The employee is reviewed by more than one evaluator.

Reverse Evaluation. A supervisor is reviewed by a subordinate.

RESULTS

The literature review indicated that certain components are necessary for an effective

employee evaluation system. In addition, the literature review established that different

organizations approach the issue of employee evaluations in diverse manners.

The original feedback form (Appendix A) was distributed to 106 attendees of National

Fire Academy resident courses. 100 questionnaires were completed and returned. This equates to

a 94.3% rate of return. The results of the feedback form are detailed in Appendix G.

Of the 100 respondents, 91 indicated that their organization utilizes employee

evaluations. 93.4% of these organizations have the supervisors evaluating the subordinates. Only

5.5% allow for subordinates to evaluate supervisors and for peer review. Even fewer, or 2.2%,

utilize external third-party appraisals.

The results to the second question, which relates to the frequency of evaluations, need to be expounded upon. Employee evaluations are completed annually in 84.6% of the organizations. 12.1% of the organizations complete evaluations semiannually and 7.7% complete evaluations quarterly. Finally, monthly evaluations are done in 6.6% of the responding organizations and 13.2% employ a different evaluation frequency. Clearly these results, when totaled, equate to more than 100%. There are four reasons for this. Firstly, a number of departments use a different frequency of evaluations for probationary, both newly hired and newly promoted, employees. Secondly, seven departments indicated that evaluations are done when an employee is transferred to a different shift or station. Thirdly, two departments allow for random evaluations. Finally, five organizations require evaluations when the evaluator is new.

Each and every department that has employee evaluations employs a written form. 72.5% couple this written form with an interview. However, of the departments that employ a follow-up evaluation when deficiencies are noted, only 53.8% use a written form as compared to 59.3% that use interviews.

The vast majority of departments, 80.2%, utilize a scale based rating system. Only 7.7% of the responding organizations employed a forced choice rating system. Employees were rated on personal characteristics in 71.4% of the responding departments, on behaviors in 86.8% of the responding departments, and on results in 79.1% of the responding departments. Additionally, the evaluator remained anonymous in only 5.4% of the departments. Finally, the evaluation results remained confidential between the evaluator and the recipient in only 7.7% of the departments.

The revised questionnaire was sent to the 15 local fire departments that have been identified as comparable departments for negotiation purposes. These departments were: Buffalo

Grove FD, Des Plaines FD, Glenview FD, Highland Park FD, Morton Grove FD, Mount

Prospect FD, Northbrook FD, North Maine FPD, Park Ridge FD, Prospect Heights FD, Rolling

Meadows FD, Skokie FD, Wheeling FD, Wilmette FD, and Winnetka FD. Of the questionnaires

distributed, 13 were returned.

Each of the responding departments utilized employee evaluations. Evaluations were

completed on officers and firefighters in 84.6 % of the departments. One department, Northbrook

FD, performs evaluations only on non-union employees. Therefore, since Northbrook

Lieutenants and firefighters are members of the International Association of Firefighters Local

1894, they are not evaluated.

None of the responding departments have subordinates evaluate supervisors or external

third-party appraisals. 7.7% of the respondents have peers evaluate peers and practice self-

appraisals.

The vast majority, 92.3%, evaluate personnel annually. 15.4% evaluate semi-annually

and 7.7% evaluate monthly. 38.5% of the respondents indicated that they evaluate on a schedule

other that monthly, quarterly, semiannually or annually. Once again, when totaled these results

equate to more than 100%. The reason for this is seven of the departments use a different

frequency of evaluations for probationary, both newly hired and newly promoted, employees.

Each responding department indicated the employment of a written form for evaluations.

All but one of the departments also conducts interviews as part of the evaluation process. When

deficiencies are noted during the evaluation, 76.9% of the departments conduct a follow-up

evaluation. Each of these departments does this by interviews. Additionally, 38.5% also utilize a

written form.

In terms of the rating system employed on the evaluation forms, none of the departments

used forced choice or critical incident method. 84.6% used narratives and 76.9% utilized a scale rating system. 92.3% of the departments rated employee behaviors, 84.6% rated personal characteristics, and 61.5% evaluated results.

Each department indicated that employee evaluations are used for employee growth and development. This was followed by 53.8% of the departments that use evaluations for promotional purposes. 46.2% of the departments use evaluations for disciplinary purposes. Finally, only 23.1% use employee evaluations for salary adjustments.

The evaluator remains anonymous in none of the responding departments. The evaluation results are seen by only the evaluator and the recipient in 7.7% of the responding departments.

The feedback form that targeted NFD personnel was distributed to 39 personnel. 33 questionnaires were completed and returned. 100% of the District Chiefs and 88.9% of the Lieutenants completed and returned the questionnaire. 81.5% of the Firefighter/Paramedics responded to the questionnaire.

51.5% of the responders indicated they felt that the employee evaluations utilized addressed their job duties. 24.2% were neutral regarding this question, while 6.1% both strongly agreed and strongly disagreed with this statement. Finally 12.1% disagreed that the present NFD evaluation addresses their job duties.

When questioned about the subjectivity of NFD evaluations, 12.1% of the respondents strongly agreed and 45.5% agreed that they were too subjective. 27.3% of the respondents were neutral on the issue of subjectivity, while 12.1% disagreed that the evaluations were too subjective. Finally, 3.0% strongly disagreed that the evaluations were too subjective.

44.6% of the responders either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the premise that the present employee evaluation process promoted personal growth and development. 30.3% of the

responders agreed that the evaluation process promoted personal growth and development.

Finally, 15.2% were neutral regarding whether the process encouraged growth and development.

3.0% of the respondents strongly agreed and 30.3% agreed that the evaluations clearly

define the rating criteria. 27.3% disagreed and 12.1% strongly disagreed with this assertion. The

remainder, or 9.1%, were neutral.

45.5% of NFD personnel responding to the questionnaire indicated that they agree that

the present evaluation process provides them guidance for future goals. 36.4% stated that they

either disagreed or strongly disagreed with this premise.

When asked whether the evaluation process offers a valid measurement of one's

performance, 3.0% strongly agreed and 30.3% agreed. 36.4% disagreed and 3.0% strongly

disagreed with this assertion. However, in regards to whether the evaluation process offered

valuable feedback, 15.2% disagreed and 3.0% strongly disagreed. 42.4% either strongly agreed

or agreed that they received valuable feedback from employee evaluations.

18.2% of the responders agreed that the evaluation process served to motivate them. The

remainder of NFD personnel, or 81.8%, were either neutral, disagreed or strongly disagreed with

this statement.

When questioned about whether their supervisor followed up on issues discussed during

the evaluation interview, 39.4% agreed that they did. 24.2% stated they either disagreed or

strongly disagreed with this statement.

The results to the two statements regarding whether the respondent could offer beneficial

anonymous feedback to their supervisors and peers were similar. Slightly over 63% responded

they strongly agreed or agreed with each statement. However, when questioned about whether

the respondent could offer beneficial feedback to their supervisors and peers if identified, in both

situations, slightly less than 55% responded they strongly agreed or agreed that they could. Similarly, a higher percentage of respondents felt that they could benefit from anonymous feedback about their performance from peers than from feedback from an identified evaluator. 66.6% of the respondents indicated that they could benefit from anonymous feedback. 57.6% of the respondents indicated that they could benefit from feedback when the identity of the evaluator is known.

21.2% of the respondents indicated that they could benefit from anonymous feedback about their performance from their subordinates. Slightly more of the respondents, 24.3%, felt that they could benefit from feedback about their performance from their subordinates if they knew the identity of the evaluator.

In summary, the results obtained were quite similar between the original questionnaire and the questionnaire sent to comparable fire departments. The vast majority of departments perform evaluations on an annual basis. Very few departments utilize multi-source evaluations. Typically, supervisors simply evaluate subordinates.

The results from both of the questionnaires further indicated that most departments intend for the evaluation process to provide for employee growth and development. A significant percentage of respondents to each questionnaire indicated that they utilize evaluations for salary adjustments, promotional purposes, and disciplinary purposes. Finally, a small percentage of respondents stated that the evaluator remained anonymous within their evaluation process.

DISCUSSION

A number of components necessary for an effective employee evaluation system were clearly documented and expounded in the literature. Ramey and Sniffen (1991) wrote that the

main objective of evaluations should be to improve the performance of the employee. They indicated that, by establishing future employment goals and identifying any training needs, this objective could be accomplished.

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) concurred with Ramey and Sniffen that evaluations need to focus on future goals and strategies. Further, they felt that a self-tracking component was important. In other words, Buckingham and Coffman wrote that the employee should be encouraged to monitor their own progress towards meeting established goals.

The current NFD evaluation forms allow for sections, in a narrative format, for developmental goals and objectives and performance development. However, no concerted effort is typically made, either by the supervisor or the employee, to monitor progress towards those goals and objectives. This was clearly indicated by the questionnaire results. Less than half of the NFD personnel felt that the employee evaluation process promoted their growth or provided them with guidance for future goals.

The feedback attained from the original questionnaire indicated that 86.8% of the responding departments utilize their evaluations for employee growth and development. Further, in regards to the results from the 13 comparable fire departments, 100.0% indicated that employee growth and development are a component of their evaluations.

Buckingham and Coffman (1999) further added the importance of more frequent interaction between evaluator and evaluatee than annually. The vast majority of all of the questioned departments, however, subscribe to the yearly time frame. The NFD also evaluates personnel on a yearly basis. It seems to this researcher that annual evaluations are not frequent enough. Perhaps if the evaluation form were more user friendly and easy to complete, as Buckingham and Coffman recommend, more frequent evaluations would undoubtedly be less

painful to conduct. At the very least, if formal evaluations are to be conducted annually, less formal interactions between evaluator and evaluatee should occur on an as needed basis, as recommended by Laford (1998).

Halas (1998) indicated that there is a definite correlation between management's philosophy and approach to evaluations and the success of the evaluation program. It seems logical to this author that the adage of leading by example would pertain in this circumstance. Specifically, if the management in a particular organization felt that evaluations were beneficial, it would seem plausible to assume that supervisors would be willing to be evaluated by their subordinates. Two of the functions of a supervisor are to provide leadership to subordinates and to be an effective manager. Subordinates are in an excellent position to rate their supervisor on these skills, abilities, and behaviors. Only 5.5% of the departments responding to the initial questionnaire have subordinates evaluating supervisors. None of the comparable departments employ this practice. Over 63% of the NFD personnel expressed confidence that they could offer beneficial feedback, anonymously, to their supervisors. However, only 51.1% felt that they could offer beneficial feedback to their supervisors if identified.

Solie (2002) cautioned against evaluation that rated an employee too heavily on personality and did not focus enough on job performance. 79.1% of the department responding to the original questionnaire and 61.5% of the comparable departments that responded to the revised questionnaire indicated that their evaluations do rate employees on results.

Laford (1998) stressed the importance of clearly defining the criteria by which an employee is evaluated. The results obtained from the questionnaire of NFD personnel indicated that only 33.3% felt that the present evaluation form clearly defined the rating criteria. Furthermore, only 33.3% also felt that the evaluations offered a valid measurement of their

performance. Finally, 57.6% of the respondents felt that the evaluations were too subjective.

Clearly these responses strongly suggest that there is a problem with the present evaluations. It is possible that the evaluations themselves are not inadequate. However, the fact that personnel have the perception that the evaluations are poor is, in and of itself, a problem. Evaluations need to be a tool to assist in employee development. If the employees themselves do not have confidence in the reliability and validity of that tool, clearly it will not serve to benefit the employee or the organization.

An important component of creating a sense of importance regarding the evaluation process is, as Halas (1998) stated, the managerial philosophy under which the evaluations are established and administered. If, for example, supervisors do not make a concerted effort to properly support and complete the evaluations, it should not be surprising that subordinates regard the evaluation as worthless.

Perhaps an additional method by which to communicate to all employees the importance of effective evaluations is for management to lead by example. If evaluations are necessary and a vital tool by which employees can improve and develop, it would seem sensible for supervisors to allow for their subordinates to evaluate them. Laford (1998) wrote of the benefit and importance of supervisors being evaluated by subordinates. This practice is followed by only 5.5% of the departments that responded to the original questionnaire and by none of the comparable departments. Most importantly, within the NFD subordinates do not evaluate supervisors.

Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) wrote that when evaluations are intended for developmental purposes, the results of the evaluation should remain confidential between the ratee and rater. If, however, the results of the evaluation are to be used for purposes other than employee

development, the results need to be visible to the organization. In the original questionnaire,

86.8% of the responding departments indicated that their evaluation results are used for

employee development and growth, 51.6% for salary adjustments, 47.3% for promotional

purposes, and 39.6% for disciplinary purposes. Yet the results of the evaluation are kept

confidential in only 7.7% of the responding departments. In the comparable questionnaire,

100.0% of the responding departments indicated that their evaluation results are used for

employee development and growth, 23.1% for salary adjustments, 53.8% for promotional

purposes, and 46.2% for disciplinary purposes. Yet the results of the evaluation are kept

confidential in only 7.7% of the responding departments. It appears to this researcher that fire

departments have not clearly defined the purpose for their evaluation process. Therefore, without

specific objectives in place, optimum practices cannot be established and followed.

The reviewed literature did not indicate a consensus regarding any definitive criteria by

which to evaluate employees. Lepsinger and Lucia (1997) opined that the evaluation criteria are

dependent on the purpose for the evaluation process. Lawson (1990) and Luthy (1998) wrote of

different approaches to this issue. However, the literature review did indicate a consensus that

evaluations need to focus on improving and encouraging employee development. In both the

original questionnaire and the comparable questionnaire the vast majority of the departments,

86.8% and 100.0% respectfully, indicated that employee growth and development was an

objective of the evaluation process. However, only 30.3% of NFD personnel agreed that the

evaluation process promoted employee growth and development.

Clearly the present NFD employee evaluation process was rated poorly by NFD

personnel. Therefore, it is apparent to this researcher that any contract proposal that allows

evaluations to have a significant impact on discipline, promotions or compensation will most

likely be rejected. If agreement is not reached during the bargaining sessions, this issue will be decided in binding arbitration. External comparability is the main criteria utilized by an arbitrator to decide on a given issue. In the original questionnaire, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they employed evaluations for compensation adjustments and promotional purposes. Slightly less than half, 39.6%, employed evaluations for disciplinary purposes. In the comparable questionnaire, approximately half of the respondents indicated that they employed evaluations for promotional purposes and disciplinary purposes. Only 23.1% employed evaluations for compensation adjustments. Therefore, if this issue is ruled on by an arbitrator, it is unclear what the resulting ruling would be.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Employee evaluations can and should be an effective organizational tool. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of NFD personnel feel the present evaluation process is less than adequate. This attitude clearly prevents NFD personnel from reaping the optimum benefits evaluations can provide.

In an effort to correct this deficiency, this author recommends the following alterations to the present evaluation process:

- The main objective for evaluations should be to foster employee growth and development. This needs to be clearly stated and communicated to all personnel.

- Departmental management should allow for subordinates to evaluate supervisors. Since employee growth and development is to be the major focus of evaluations, it seems logical that supervisors may benefit from feedback offered by subordinates. Additionally, by participating in this manner, management is communicating their perception of the

importance of the evaluation process.

- The subordinate evaluators should be allowed to remain anonymous. This will allow for subordinate evaluations uninfluenced by the fear of adverse repercussions.

- The results of all evaluations should remain known only to the evaluator and the evaluatee.

- No attempt should be made during contract negotiations to allow employee evaluations to have a significant impact on discipline, promotions or compensation.

- The Village of Niles Human Resources Department should further evaluate the format and content of the present forms utilized by the NFD. The specific issue of the precise content and wording of evaluation forms is well beyond the scope of this research project. As indicated by the literature, there appears to be no universally accepted best practices in this matter.

- Once the above adjustments to the NFD evaluation process have been made and utilized for a period of time, the issue of allowing evaluations to have a greater impact on discipline, promotions and compensation can be revisit and negotiated.

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APPENDIX A (Feedback form - original)

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION PROCESS FEEDBACK FORM

Department: _____

City:_____   State:_____

Contact person: _____

Telephone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Number of employees: _____

1. Does your department utilize any type of employee evaluation process?

_____Yes, please check all that apply   _____No, please return survey

_____Evaluations are done on Officers   _____Evaluations are done on Firefighters

_____Supervisors evaluate subordinates   _____Subordinates evaluate supervisors

_____Peers evaluate peers   _____Self-appraisals

_____External third-party appraisals

2. How often are these employee evaluations completed?

_____Monthly   _____Quarterly   _____Semiannually   _____Annually

_____Other (please specify)_____

3. The employee evaluation process consists of (please check all that apply):

_____Written form   _____Interview

4. If deficiencies are noted, a follow-up evaluation consists of (please check all that apply):

_____Written form   _____Interview   _____No follow-up

5. The rating system utilized on the employee evaluation form is (please check all that apply):

_____Scale (1 to 5, poor to excellent)　　　　　_____Forced choice (select best and worst)

_____Narrative

_____Critical incident method (actual incidents of performance are documented)

6. What is rated in the employee evaluation (check all that apply):

_____Personal characteristics　　　　　_____Behaviors

_____Results

7. Is the employee evaluation used for (check all that apply):

_____Employee growth and development　　　　　_____Salary adjustments

_____Promotional purposes　　　　　_____Disciplinary purposes

8. Does the evaluator remain anonymous?

_____Yes　　　　　_____No

9. Are the evaluation results kept confidential between the evaluator and the recipient?

_____Yes　　　　　_____No

10. Do the questions asked in this survey adequately detail your employee evaluation process?

_____Yes　　　　　_____No (please describe below)

Describe: _____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Please return the completed survey to:
Barry Mueller - Executive Leadership

APPENDIX B (Feedback form fax cover sheet - comparables)

NILES FIRE DEPARTMENT

8360 Dempster Street
Niles, IL 60714
(847) 588-6800
FAX: (847) 588-6850

<u>FAX COVER SHEET</u>

DATE: April 10, 2002

TO: Fire Chief

DEPARTMENT: Fire

FROM: Barry Mueller, Deputy Chief

NUMBER OF SHEETS (including this cover sheet): 4

MESSAGE: Chief, please find an attached cover letter and feedback form. Your prompt response would be greatly appreciated. Please don't hesitate to call with any questions you may have. Thank you.

APPENDIX C (Feedback form cover letter - comparables)

NILES FIRE DEPARTMENT
8360 DEMPSTER STREET
NILES, ILLINOIS 60714

FAX: 847-588-6850   PHONE: 847-588-6800

April 9, 2002

Dear Fire Chief:

 I have recently completed my fourth and final course of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. One of the requirements of the program is that, after each course, every student must complete a comprehensive applied research project. This questionnaire is part of my project on employee evaluation processes. I would greatly appreciate it if you would complete this questionnaire and return to me as soon as possible. In advance, I thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

Barry Mueller
Deputy Chief

APPENDIX D (Feedback form – comparables)

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION PROCESS FEEDBACK FORM

Department: _____

City: _____ State: _____

Contact person: _____

Telephone number: _____

E-mail address: _____

Number of employees: _____

1. Does your department utilize any type of employee evaluation process?

_____Yes, please check all that apply   _____No, please return survey

_____Evaluations are done on Officers   _____Evaluations are done on Firefighters

_____Supervisors evaluate subordinates   _____Subordinates evaluate supervisors

_____Peers evaluate peers   _____Self-appraisals

_____External third-party appraisals

2. How often are these employee evaluations completed?

_____Monthly   _____Quarterly   _____Semiannually   _____Annually

_____Other (please specify)_____

3. The employee evaluation process consists of (please check all that apply):

_____Written form   _____Interview

4. If deficiencies are noted, a follow-up evaluation consists of (please check all that apply):

_____Written form   _____Interview   _____No follow-up

5. The rating system utilized on the employee evaluation form is (please check all that apply):

_____Scale (1 to 5, poor to excellent)   _____Forced choice (select best and worst)

_____Narrative

_____Critical incident method (actual incidents of performance are documented)

6. What is rated in the employee evaluation (check all that apply):

_____Personal characteristics   _____Behaviors

_____Results

7. Is the employee evaluation used for (check all that apply):

_____Employee growth and development   _____Salary adjustments

_____Promotional purposes   _____Disciplinary purposes

8. Does the evaluator remain anonymous?

_____Yes   _____No

9. Are the evaluation results seen by only the evaluator and the recipient?

_____Yes   _____No

10. Do the questions asked in this survey adequately detail your employee evaluation process?

_____Yes   _____No (please describe below)

Describe: _____

_____

_____

_____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.
Please fax the completed survey to:
Niles Fire Department
Attention: Barry Mueller
Fax: (847) 588-6850

APPENDIX E (Questionnaire memorandum – NFD personnel)

NILES FIRE DEPARTMENT

<u>Memorandum</u>

DATE: April 15, 2002

TO: All Personnel

FROM: Deputy Chief Mueller

SUBJECT: Employee Evaluation Process Questionnaire

       I have recently completed my fourth and final course of the Executive Fire Officer Program at the National Fire Academy. One of the requirements of the program is that, after each course, every student must complete a comprehensive applied research project. This questionnaire is part of my project on employee evaluations. I would greatly appreciate it if you would complete the attached and return to me as soon as possible. In advance, I thank you for your cooperation.

cc: Chief Kinowski

APPENDIX F (Questionnaire – NFD personnel)

EMPLOYEE EVALUATION PROCESS QUESTIONNAIRE

1. My present position is:

_____Firefighter/Paramedic   _____Lieutenant   _____District Chief

2. The employee evaluation form presently utilized addresses my personal job duties.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

3. Employee evaluations are too subjective.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

4. The present employee evaluation process promotes my growth and development.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

5. The employee evaluation form presently utilized clearly defines the criteria by which I am evaluated.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

6. The present employee evaluation process provides me guidance for future goals.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

7. The present employee evaluation process offers a valid measurement of my performance.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

8. The present employee evaluation process gives me useful feedback.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

9. The present employee evaluation process serves to motivate me.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

10. My supervisor follows up on issues discussed during the evaluation interview.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

11. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, anonymously, to my supervisors regarding their performance.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

12. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, if identified, to my supervisors regarding their performance.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

13. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, anonymously, to my peers about their performance.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

14. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, if identified, to my peers about their performance.

_____Strongly Agree   _____Agree   _____Neutral

_____Disagree   _____Strongly Disagree

15. I think I could benefit from anonymous feedback about my performance from my peers.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Neutral

_____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

16. I think I could benefit from feedback about my performance from my peers if I knew the identity of the evaluator.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Neutral

_____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree

17. I think I could benefit from anonymous feedback about my performance from my subordinates.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Neutral

_____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree _____Not Applicable

18. I think I could benefit from feedback about my performance from my subordinates if I knew the identity of the evaluator.

_____Strongly Agree _____Agree _____Neutral

_____Disagree _____Strongly Disagree _____Not Applicable

19. If you would like to comment on any aspect of the present employee evaluation process, please do so:

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

APPENDIX G (Feedback form – original: results)

1. Does your department utilize any type of employee evaluation process?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	91.0
No	9.0
Evaluations are done on Officers	82.4
Evaluations are done on Firefighters	93.4
Supervisors evaluate subordinates	93.4
Subordinates evaluate supervisors	5.5
Peers evaluate peers	5.5
Self-appraisals	16.5
External third-party appraisals	2.2

2. How often are these employee evaluations completed?

Answer	Percentage
Monthly	6.6
Quarterly	7.7
Semiannually	12.1
Annually	84.6
Other	13.2

3. The employee evaluation process consists of (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Written form	100.0
Interview	72.5

4. If deficiencies are noted, a follow-up evaluation consists of (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Written form	53.8
Interview	59.3
No follow-up	22.0

5. The rating system utilized on the employee evaluation form is (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Scale	80.2
Forced choice (select best and worst)	7.7
Narrative	64.8
Critical incident method	19.8

6. What is rated in the employee evaluation (check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Personal characteristics	71.4
Behaviors	86.8
Results	79.1

7. Is the employee evaluation used for (check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Employee growth and development	86.8
Salary adjustments	51.6
Promotional purposes	47.3
Disciplinary purposes	39.6

8. Does the evaluator remain anonymous?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	5.4
No	94.6

9. Are the evaluation results kept confidential between the evaluator and the recipient?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	7.7
No	92.3

APPENDIX H (Feedback form – comparables: results)

1. Does your department utilize any type of employee evaluation process?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	100.0
No	0.0
Evaluations are done on Officers	84.6
Evaluations are done on Firefighters	84.6
Supervisors evaluate subordinates	84.6
Subordinates evaluate supervisors	0.0
Peers evaluate peers	7.7
Self-appraisals	7.7
External third-party appraisals	0.0

2. How often are these employee evaluations completed?

Answer	Percentage
Monthly	7.7
Quarterly	0.0
Semiannually	15.4
Annually	92.3
Other	38.5

3. The employee evaluation process consists of (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Written form	100.0
Interview	92.3

4. If deficiencies are noted, a follow-up evaluation consists of (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Written form	38.5
Interview	76.9
No follow-up	23.1

5. The rating system utilized on the employee evaluation form is (please check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Scale	76.9
Forced choice (select best and worst)	0.0
Narrative	84.6
Critical incident method	0.0

6. What is rated in the employee evaluation (check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Personal characteristics	84.6
Behaviors	92.3
Results	61.5

7. Is the employee evaluation used for (check all that apply):

Answer	Percentage
Employee growth and development	100.0
Salary adjustments	23.1
Promotional purposes	53.8
Disciplinary purposes	46.2

8. Does the evaluator remain anonymous?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	0.0
No	100.0

9. Are the evaluation results seen by only the evaluator and the recipient?

Answer	Percentage
Yes	7.7
No	92.3

APPENDIX I (Questionnaire – NFD personnel: results)

2. The employee evaluation form presently utilized addresses my personal job duties.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6.1
Agree	51.5
Neutral	24.2
Disagree	12.1
Strongly Disagree	6.1

3. Employee evaluations are too subjective.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12.1
Agree	45.5
Neutral	27.3
Disagree	12.1
Strongly Disagree	3.0

4. The present employee evaluation process promotes my growth and development.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0.0
Agree	30.3
Neutral	15.2
Disagree	39.4
Strongly Disagree	15.2

5. The employee evaluation form presently utilized clearly defines the criteria by which I am evaluated.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	30.3
Neutral	9.1
Disagree	27.3
Strongly Disagree	12.1

6. The present employee evaluation process provides me guidance for future goals.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0.0
Agree	45.5
Neutral	18.2
Disagree	27.3
Strongly Disagree	9.1

7. The present employee evaluation process offers a valid measurement of my performance.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	30.3
Neutral	27.3
Disagree	36.4
Strongly Disagree	3.0

8. The present employee evaluation process gives me useful feedback.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	39.4
Neutral	39.4
Disagree	15.2
Strongly Disagree	3.0

9. The present employee evaluation process serves to motivate me.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0.0
Agree	18.2
Neutral	42.4
Disagree	36.4
Strongly Disagree	3.0

10. My supervisor follows up on issues discussed during the evaluation interview.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	0.0
Agree	39.4
Neutral	36.4
Disagree	21.2
Strongly Disagree	3.0

11. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, anonymously, to my supervisors regarding their performance.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	21.1
Agree	42.4
Neutral	21.2
Disagree	9.1
Strongly Disagree	9.1

12. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, if identified, to my supervisors regarding their performance.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	48.5
Neutral	24.2
Disagree	15.2
Strongly Disagree	9.1

13. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, anonymously, to my peers about their performance.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	15.2
Agree	48.5
Neutral	27.3
Disagree	3.0
Strongly Disagree	6.1

14. I think I could offer beneficial feedback, if identified, to my peers about their performance.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	51.5
Neutral	27.3
Disagree	6.1
Strongly Disagree	12.1

15. I think I could benefit from anonymous feedback about my performance from my peers.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	12.1
Agree	54.5
Neutral	15.2
Disagree	12.1
Strongly Disagree	6.1

16. I think I could benefit from feedback about my performance from my peers if I knew the identity of the evaluator.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6.1
Agree	51.5
Neutral	15.2
Disagree	24.2
Strongly Disagree	3.0

17. I think I could benefit from anonymous feedback about my performance from my subordinates.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	3.0
Agree	18.2
Neutral	3.0
Disagree	6.1
Strongly Disagree	3.0
Not Applicable	66.7

18. I think I could benefit from feedback about my performance from my subordinates if I knew the identity of the evaluator.

Answer	Percentage
Strongly Agree	6.1
Agree	18.2
Neutral	3.0
Disagree	3.0
Strongly Disagree	3.0
Not Applicable	66.7