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The Process of Evaluation – Ways to Assess “How Are We Doing?”

Michigan State University Extension Service

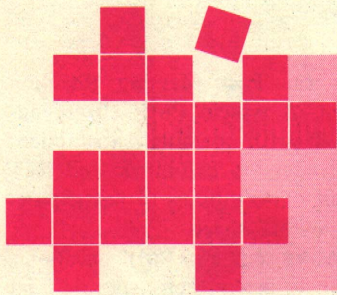
Maxine Ferris, Staff Development and Training

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The Process of Evaluation

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Ways to Assess "How Are We Doing?"

Prepared by Maxine Ferris, Specialist in Staff Development and Training

Many organizations have been around for five, ten, or even twenty years. Some still have a fairly stable membership. It is reasonable to ask, "How are these groups doing?" "How have they matured and improved?" "Have they benefited from past experiences?" "Are they still evolving, developing?"

What is the health of your organization?

Is Your Group Mature?

Some years ago, Sociologist Franklyn Haiman, put forth the notion that groups, like people, can and should go through a developmental process. His criteria of maturity provide a tool for examining the developmental age of groups.

In "infancy," groups tend to be disorganized and very dependent upon their leaders. In "adolescence," members struggle to gain more independence and do more for themselves. The "mature" group can handle problems, make intelligent decisions and work productively.

Haiman's criteria are an excellent vehicle for self-appraisal. According to Haiman, a mature group:

1. has a clear understanding of its purposes or goals.
2. makes progress toward its goals with maximum, efficiency and minimum wasted effort.
3. is able to look ahead and plan ahead.
4. has achieved effective intercommunication.
5. can initiate and carry on effective, logical problem solving.
6. has achieved an appropriate balance between established ways of working together and readiness to change.

7. is objective about its own functioning; can face its procedural-emotional problems and intelligently make needed modifications.
8. strikes an appropriate balance between group productivity (socio-group functions) and the satisfaction of ego need (psyche-group functions).
9. provides for the diffusion and sharing of leadership.
10. achieves an appropriate balance between content and process in group actions.
11. is highly cohesive but not exclusive or to the point of stifling individuality.
12. makes intelligent use of the differing abilities of its members.
13. faces reality, and works on the basis of fact rather than fantasy.
14. provides an atmosphere of psychological freedom for the expression of all feelings and points of view.
15. is not overdominated by its leader or any members.
16. has achieved a healthy balance between cooperative and competitive behavior of members.
17. strikes an appropriate balance between emotionality and rationality.
18. can readily change and adapt to the needs of differing situations.
19. recognizes that means are inseparable from ends.
20. recognizes the values and limitations of democratic procedures.

A group of long-standing that appears to be still "in diapers" has reason to question its validity and purpose. Too many groups, instead of having five years

experience working together, have really had the **same experience** repeated five times. But it is never too late to start growing. Regardless of its history, a group can take stock of its position and plan improvement. It is rewarding for a group to measure itself against past performance and say, "See how we've grown and matured this year!"

Other "Yardsticks"

Groups may use other yardsticks besides "maturity" to evaluate themselves. Several are designed to measure "accomplishment" in its broadest sense. Assess your group by asking:

1. How well is this group as a group progressing towards a goal?
2. How well is this group fitting its immediate goals into the broader framework of society?
3. How well does this group utilize its members' potentialities to contribute to its work goals?
4. How well is this group helping its members to become better contributors, to assume a wider variety of essential group roles than present potentialities allow them?
5. How well is this group able to work with other groups who have similar goals?

Is Your Group "Effective?"

Some people find it difficult to assess their group as "good" or "bad" but can describe specifically what the group can do. They may find it useful to compare the behavior of their group with that described by G. McGregor in his description of an "effective" group.

1. The atmosphere is informal, comfortable, relaxed.
2. There is a lot of discussion; nearly everyone participates. Discussions stay on the track.
3. Everyone understands and accepts the task or objective of the group. Free discussion precedes determination of policy.
4. The members listen to each other. Every idea is given a hearing. People are not afraid to put forth a creative thought even if it seems fairly extreme.
5. There are disagreements. These are not suppressed or overridden by premature group action. Viewpoints get a fair hearing.
6. Most decisions are reached by a consensus in which it is clear that everyone is willing to go along. Formal voting is at a minimum; the group does not accept a simple majority as a proper basis for action.
7. Criticism is frequent, frank and relatively comfortable. There is little personal attack, open or hidden.
8. People can express their feelings freely as well as their ideas, both on the problem and on the group's operation.
9. When action is taken, clear assignments are made and accepted.
10. The chairman of the group does not dominate it. Leadership shifts from time to time, depending upon the circumstances. There is little evidence of a struggle for power as the group operates. The issue is not who controls but how to get the job done.
11. The group is self-conscious of its own operation.

Groups may want to examine particular aspects of their interactions: leadership, productivity, learning, discussion process, conflict management, use of time, format, morale, participation.

The group or its leaders can select the type of evaluation tool that will produce the desired information. Some people prefer open-ended questionnaires where respondents can both describe and evaluate. Others feel more confident using rating scales, making charts, counting, classifying or writing narratives. Whenever possible, groups should consider using several evaluation types.

Although some evaluation tools were designed for use by professionals, most can be mastered by well-trained observers, drawn from the membership. It may be desirable to have the entire membership participate in the evaluating process. This requires adequate time, usually at the close of the meeting.

Feedback is imperative. Regardless of the method selected, it is important that members who participate in evaluation be aware that some use is being made of their inputs. Otherwise, they will likely refuse to participate fully in subsequent evaluation activities.

What's A PMR Sheet?

One popular and simple tool that draws out member feelings concerning the overall tone and operation of the

group is the Post Meeting Reaction evaluation. A typical PMR sheet concerns itself with member satisfaction, style of leadership exhibited, and feelings about opportunities to participate. See sample PMR sheet.

In phrasing your own PMR questions, remember to keep them specific and probably no more than six or seven in number. Usually the PMR sheets are not discussed at the time of their completion. Reporting on the group's reaction is often a good way to begin the next meeting.

Some leaders, especially those who feel secure and wish to improve, may request that their behavior be judged by the members. Rating scales are popular for this purpose. Members, too, might benefit from a little self-evaluation. "How well did I participate?" is a question members should ask.

POST MEETING REACTION SHEET			
1. How satisfied are you with the results of the discussion?	Very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Dissatisfied
2. How well organized and systematic was the discussion?	Disorderly	Just right	Too rigid
3. How do you feel about the style of leadership supplied by the chairperson?	Too autocratic	Democratic	Weak
4. Preparation for the meeting was	Thorough	Adequate	Poor
5. Did you find yourself wanting to speak when you didn't get a chance?	Almost never	Occasionally	Often
6. How do you feel about working again with this same group?	Eager	I will	Reluctant
Comments:			

Why Evaluate?

If evaluation is to be useful, all of the membership should be aware of its purpose: the improvement of group functioning and productivity. It is not intended as a scheme for grading individual members nor placing blame for past failures. One would hope that individual members would benefit from the information derived and attempt to modify their behavior accordingly; but the real gain should be in the total functioning of the group.

Since participant behavior may differ during different segments of the same meeting, it may be helpful to do comparative evaluation during a given meeting, noting quantity and quality of participation during different parts of the discussion. Knowing that certain individuals come on strong at the start of the discussion and others participate better later on can be useful information for the leader. Also, if it becomes apparent that the group suffers from mid-meeting "blahs," compensatory activities may be incorporated or a needed break scheduled.

Evaluation can be most useful when:

1. it does not become routine. (Common sense dictates that it not become an end in itself or be done so often that it loses impact.)
2. it is handled briskly, objectively, and "without casting stones."
3. it incorporates the feedback of evaluators or observers to improve the workings of the group.
4. it is not viewed as a cure-all for all of the group's problems.

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