

Combining employee feedback with self-evaluation highlights interesting discrepancies

MEASURING SUPERVISOR COMMUNICATION

Ongoing measurement of the effectiveness of manager communication is an important element of any program to support and improve skills and competencies in this area. Here, Angela Sinickas explains how to use absolute and relative measurement techniques to gather specific feedback on all leaders, starting with the CEO

If supervisors are expected to communicate well and frequently in your organization, using surveys to measure their current effectiveness can be helpful – not only to the supervisors and their own employees, but also to your training department in order to help them develop priorities and agendas.

Surveys of managers' communication competence can be even more useful when a group of employees complete the questionnaire regarding their own managers by name, so the results are specific to an individual's training needs, yet the overall results can be combined for an organizational assessment.

Starting at the top

This process works best if it begins at the top, with the executive staff first assessing the CEO, who feeds back to the respondents what he or she learned from the results. Then these executives' direct reports complete the surveys about the executives, who, in turn, positively feed back the results to their staff.

When the assessment cascades downward, each new group of evaluators feels safe in being candid and in having their own direct reports evaluate them, because they've already experienced the benefits of providing this type of

feedback to their own bosses in a safe environment.

Key measurement decisions

There are two key measurement decisions to make if you want to measure supervisory communication effectiveness:

- 1) **Will the evaluation be absolute or relative?** An absolute evaluation lets you know how good "good" is and how bad "bad" is – and how much different measures improve after corrections have been made. Using a relative evaluation, respondents rank-order the skills from most to least effectively demonstrated by their managers. So, if 10 skills are listed, even a strong communicator will have one skill ranked at the bottom, one at the top, and eight in the middle. Similarly, an ineffective communicator will receive a top ranking for some aspect of communication skills. The relative evaluation is safer when each manager is identified individually – it's disturbing enough to encourage change, yet not threatening enough to prevent employees from filling out the forms.
- 2) **Will supervisors and managers be asked to evaluate themselves as well as be evaluated by their subordinates?** Comparing the results of how managers think they communicate, with how their subordinates rate them, often highlights very interesting and surprising discrepancies.

evaluations.

Analysing the research

At one company, we identified during individual interviews a list of 33 communication skills that managers said were most important. Although these skills could have been collapsed into fewer related-skill categories, the skills the managers themselves suggested had their own precision and strength. Plus, their commitment to the evaluation and training process increased when they saw all their input used verbatim on the subsequent skills assessment form.

At another company, the quality improvement manager believed that employees could treat customers well only if they were being treated with respect by their own managers. To assess how well managers were managing, from their employees' perspective, we developed a 14-question managerial evaluation on several aspects of supervisory skills – including five communication behaviors – as part of the quality-improvement process. We identified the critical 14 managerial behaviors for this client based on employee focus-group discussions.

Each employee was able to fill out an evaluation form anonymously on any individual manager above him or her, up through the vice president level, by the manager's name, as long as they had had repeated direct contact together.

The field employees were resurveyed every six months on all 14 questions, and their management group's compensation was based partly on improving their scores. During the first year this approach was used, two dramatic things happened. Most supervisors began treating their employees more like human beings. The most blatant



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Figures One, Two and Three (right) provide examples of the difference in how you would structure a questionnaire asking for either absolute evaluations or relative

occurrences of yelling, swearing and berating performance in public, certainly stopped immediately. A few other supervisors who felt unable to change their management styles – and didn't like the reduced compensation they were facing – left the company, making room for more enlightened replacements.

The best part of their departure was that most of these destructive managers started working for my client's competitors. scm

Figure One: Absolute evaluation

	Never	Rarely	Some of the time	Usually	Almost Always
My supervisor writes clearly					
My supervisor is good at conducting staff meetings					
My supervisor asks for input before making decisions that affect our work group					

Figure Two: Relative evaluation

<p>Instructions For the communication skills in Column 1, rank-order in Column 2 how well your own supervisor or manager performs them. Write in a "1" for the skill he or she performs best, a "2" for the second best skill, all the way through to "10" for the skill he or she needs to work on the most. Then, in Column 3, rank-order the same skills to indicate how important it is for supervisors and managers to possess and demonstrate those skills. Write in a "10" for the most important, a "9" for the</p>	<p>next most important, all the way through to "1" for the communication skill that you believe is the least important.</p> <p>Note Individual training priorities would begin with those skills that employees rate as fairly important to have, but not particularly well displayed by their supervisor. These are quickly identified by multiplying the two scores for each skill. The communication behaviors with the largest scores are the ones to focus on improving first.</p>	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Communication skills</th> <th>My supervisor's rank order 1 = best skill 10 = worst skill</th> <th>Importance for supervisors to have this skill 1 = least important 10 = most important</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Giving clear instructions</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Asking for employee suggestions</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Conducting effective staff meetings</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Providing immediate feedback when I do well or badly</td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Communication skills	My supervisor's rank order 1 = best skill 10 = worst skill	Importance for supervisors to have this skill 1 = least important 10 = most important	Giving clear instructions			Asking for employee suggestions			Conducting effective staff meetings			Providing immediate feedback when I do well or badly		
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Figure Three: Relative managerial evaluation by subordinate and self

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