

Why Do Collective Evaluations - and How?

The absence of supervisors, who are charged with immediately identifying and addressing problem performance, makes the *periodic* occurrence of worker evaluations critical in a collective. In the absence of such evaluations, problem behaviors are allowed to fester until they erupt; someone finally becomes so fed up with the situation that s/he puts it on the collective's agenda (perhaps after months of muted complaints and a climactic public outburst); unfortunately, by the time the collective focuses on the problem, it has become so entrenched and emotionally-charged as to be difficult to remedy. One objective of periodic evaluations is to identify and address problems before they become entrenched or result in angry eruptions and resentments.

Another objective of periodic evaluations is to give affirmation to people for good performance. Again, this takes on particular importance in the absence of supervisors who (under the best circumstances) would see it as part of their job to point out and reward good performance. Often in a collective, workers do not feel empowered to comment on the good performance of others ("Who am I to judge?") or, at least, do not make/take opportunities to provide compliments. This absence of feedback can leave collective members feeling underappreciated or insecure.

Finally, evaluations should track/document a worker's progress and problems while identifying needs for further training and support.

The most common system of evaluation used in collectives is what might be called the "general meeting" model, the worker is evaluated in a meeting by all co-workers (or perhaps just by all Members). This model has the appeal of simplicity and egalitarianism (everyone, theoretically, has an equal role). This model is not as simple as it seems -- and in its simplest form is not very effective. Evaluations cannot simply be left to the general will; at the very least, responsibility for calendaring the evaluations must be delegated to an individual or small committee. For an effective evaluation, I would submit that further preparation is necessary.