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**Evaluation of Managers:
The Challenges of Employee Evaluation
of Managerial Staff Through The Use of
Performance Ratings.**

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Abstract

As businesses strive to improve operations and streamline workflow, managers are expected to motivate employees towards giving a greater commitment to the goals of the employer. This in turn affects the implementation of strategic initiatives by upper management. Employees on the frontlines can be a valuable asset when collecting data on strategic initiatives by managers (Meers, 2007). Mathis and Jackson (2006) indicate three distinct advantages in using employees to rate managers. The first is the identification of competent managers. The second advantage comes in motivating managers to become responsive to the employee and finally, managers may use the information to aid in career development by identifying areas of needed growth. The challenge lies in getting employees to accurately rate motivational activities of management for their effectiveness and overall influence on the worker. There are several ways to accomplish this task; however, the use of the multisource or 360° job performance rating system is on the rise in many organizations (Conway & Huffcutt, 1997). The purpose of this research is to ascertain why many upper-level managers do not utilize employee evaluations of managerial staff as a tool to identify effective managers. The study used qualitative methods in the form of in-depth interviews with human resource managers in the public and private sectors. The instrument used to collect this data was developed specifically to encourage feedback on the rationale used to form these biases. After the data was collected an analysis was performed to categorize the responses into fundamental themes. This research will provide executive officers beneficial insight into the significance and value associated with subordinate employee assessments of managers.

Keywords: Employee evaluation, Managers, Surveys

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I. Introduction

In today's business climate "a rapidly changing landscape of business competition has produced heated discussions about the effectiveness of popular management approaches to address today's organizational challenges" (Dervitsiotis, 2001, p. 687). The need to improve and stream line operations is vital for a company to maintain a competitive edge. In this light "the behavior of top level executives impacts the organizations bottom-line" (Robie, Brown, & Bly, 2008, p.131). Organizations must be careful not to take a narrow focus on management's effectiveness. Failure to put the right people in the right positions and failure to address problems in a timely manner, ultimately lead to a decrease in management's leadership effectiveness (Henning, 2009). Not only do top executives affect the bottom-line, attention must be paid to all the significant processes going on inside an organization (Dervitsiotis, 2001). The effectiveness of lower management, for example, has a direct impact on productivity. In today's business world it is a widely held view that every manager, without regard for his or her functional specialization, is on the frontline of people management which directly relates to productivity (Perry, & Kulik, 2008).

With the approaching retirement of many seasoned managers due to the baby boomer phenomenon along with the increasingly competitive job market and multinational workforce, more importance is being placed on employee engagement. These factors are driving employers to find managers with talents in engaging workers to increase productivity and employee retention (Ketter, 2008). Employers must ask their managers a number of questions: do you

properly motivate your people, are you caring about your people, and are you challenging your people (Ketter, 2008)? These factors have a direct impact on the employee and productivity.

How does upper management determine the effectiveness of the frontline managers? One solution is through an appraisal process designed to measure the effectiveness of managers and employee engagement. This can be done by using employee surveys specifically designed to determine a supervisor's effectiveness. Measuring engagement is relatively simple and reliable. The time requirement is usually no more than 10 to 15 minutes per employee making it financially attractive (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005). Mathis and Jackson (2006) indicate three distinct advantages in using employees to rate managers. The first is the identification of competent managers. The second advantage comes in motivating managers to become responsive to the employee, and finally, managers may take the information to aid in career development by identifying areas of needed growth.

Appraisals can be critical to a company's success. Accurate appraisals provide companies information to identify employees with the potential to assume new duties and responsibilities or be promoted to new positions (Camardella, 2003). This holds true for managers as well, in light of their responsibility to engage and motivate their employees to foster increased productivity and loyalty. Highly engaged employees generally give the extra effort because they care, not because the manager requires the effort (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005).

Some challenges lie in getting employees to accurately rate motivational activities by management for their effectiveness and overall influence on the worker. Employees can be very suspicious and apprehensive towards company research (Lawrence, 2007). One way to calm employee fears is by using a third party to administer the survey. The key to achieving honest input from employees is to guarantee the anonymity of the respondents (Lawrence, 2007). The

appraisal should be an accurate, honest evaluation of performance, reflecting both strengths and weaknesses (Camardella, 2003).

There is no one size fits all solution for managers in creating engagement with employees. Research (Ketter, 2008) also shows no correlation between size of the company or workforce when assessing engagement drivers. Ketter also states, “The top drivers of engagement come down to the employee’s connection between their work and the organization’s success. The second driver is an employee’s belief that his work matters to the organization.” (p. 46) The point to remember is, regardless of whether the assessment is intended as a developmental screening aid or an administrative tool, care should be taken to provide high quality information back to managers about their performance because important decisions are made from these results (Hannum, 2007).

Currently there is a gap between the existing theory and research on the perspective of the frontline employee as to the success and failure of management’s efforts to implement strategic initiatives. Most of the existing literature primarily maps out the steps a manager must take when dealing with employees, but only hints at utilizing the feedback of frontline associates when evaluating the effectiveness of these managers (Meers, 2007). Due to the rapidly changing environment of business competition there has been heated discussions about the effectiveness of many popular management approaches used to address today’s organizational challenges (Dervitsiotis, 2001). Employee evaluations of management may be a useful tool in understanding the effect management is having on the workplace.

This paper is organized as follows: Section II provides a review of literature. Section III discusses the methods used in this study. In section IV the results of the study are presented.

Section V holds a discussion on the material presented in this study. The conclusion is reported in section VI.

II. Review of Literature

In today's rapidly changing business conditions, globalization and advancements in technology organizations are being increasingly viewed as living entities where human resources are becoming the dominant influence with respect to viability and success. The management of these resources is vital to the continued growth of the organization (Dervitsiotis, 2001). Today employees are being recognized by both academics and practitioners as the most crucial asset an organization has (Dahlgard, & Eskildsen, 2000). In an effort to understand and improve organizational performance, attention must be paid to all significant processes going on inside an organization. When making a serious effort to improve performance, focus must not be limited to material flow alone (Dervitsiotis, 2001). It is important to realize that "without satisfied and motivated employees it is impossible to produce world-class products and impossible to achieve satisfied and loyal customers" (Dahlgard, & Eskildsen, 2000, p.1081). Communication down the management chain to workers is vital. Most research suggests the sharing of information by managers has a direct and positive effect on a group's performance (Moye, & Langfred, 2006).

Employee engagement by management is vital; as "people have become the primary source of competitive advantage" (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005, p. 3) Employee engagement is primarily accomplished at the supervisory level. The fact is no one has as much impact on the state of employee engagement as an employee's immediate supervisor. Wellins, Bernthal, and Phelps (2005) demonstrate the importance of engaging employees through "Engagement Drivers" in Figure 1. In this figure, it can be seen that managers play a vital role through leadership. This demonstrates that leadership is an important driver in the process. When

organizations have taken the time to engage employees, the long-term benefits appear in the organizations success. “The quality of an organization’s talent, its passion and commitment, is nearly impossible to replicate” (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005, p. 3). With the increased focus on management to spur growth and increase revenue, organizations are relying on managers to encourage employees to come into alignment with company goals and important objectives in a strategic effort to increase employee commitment (O’Neil, 2008). In today’s business structure every manager without regard for his or her specialization is on the front line of people management (Perry, & Kulik, 2008).

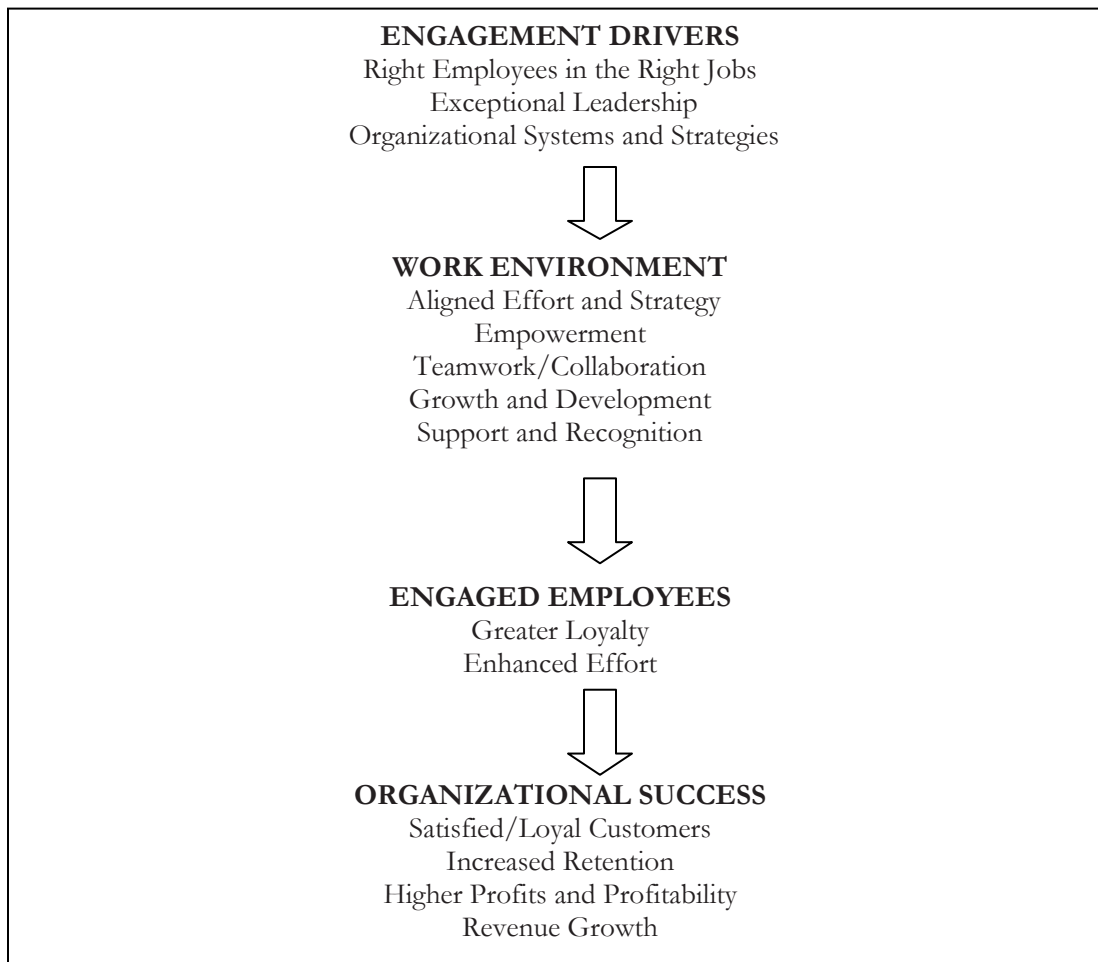


Figure 1: Engagement drivers (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005 p.10)

Many studies highlight the importance of management’s ability to communicate with

their employees and to use engagement strategies in the workplace (Ketter, 2008). The challenge for many organizations is in the measurement of effectiveness by management to obtain positive employee engagement. Lawrence (2007) states that one of the most common ways used today to measure employee engagement is through the use of satisfaction surveys. These surveys are basically designed to determine what the employee's perceptions of their work environment might be. By doing this, organizations feel they can "take action to increase workers' sense of involvement with the company and its objectives, improve recruitment and retention rates, and enhance understanding of development needs" (Lawrence, 2007, p. 26). Employee surveys have become a standard tool for human resource employees to reach out and understand to their employee base. Yet, when surveys reach the employees, they may not understand why they should complete them. If they do not, the result is a missed opportunity by management to gather important feedback (Witse, 2008).

According to Lawrence (2007), "We are surrounded by research. In fact, some organizations conduct more surveys than they can reasonably absorb. This may be good news for research companies, but less constructive, for the organizations concerned" (p. 26). One area that has been less explored is the use of surveys designed to gather employee input on the effectiveness of management. Gunn (2004) pointed out this simple equation: "Profits = customer satisfaction X employee satisfaction X leader effectiveness" (p. 8). If this is the case, tools designed to gauge leadership effectiveness should be on the forefront of HR management. Sinickas (2006) explained that the view that "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" (p. 12). In this case, using

employees to rate their manager's performance seems to be a logical step in the evaluation process. Understanding all the factors that contribute to employee satisfaction and productivity can lead to better employee engagement, increased productivity, higher staff retention, and ultimately enhanced profitability (Lawrence, 2007).

Literature points to frontline employees as being recognized as valuable assets to many firms, however, their views have been overlooked as a resource in many instances (Meers, 2007). One primary area of interest is in management's ability to effectively communicate with employees. Many executives often wonder if the organizations primary goals and objectives are understood fully by their employees. Research has shown that the ability of management to communicate effectively with employees is a strong indicator of employee comprehension of a businesses strategy (O'Neil, 2008). In this light the importance of feedback is essential. Employee engagement is another area where feedback would be of value to a business. Research has demonstrated if employee engagement scores are high the performance of the organization is much better (Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps, 2005). Wellins, Bernthal, & Phelps (2005) also stated "The economic impact of low engagement can be staggering" (p. 1).

III. Research Methods

The purpose of this research is to ascertain if employee evaluations of managers is being utilized as a tool in identifying effective managers and the viewpoint of human resource directors towards the use of such a tool. The study used qualitative methods in the form of in-depth interviews with ten human resource managers in the public and private sectors. The survey group consisted of public school districts (n=3), municipalities (n=3), manufacturers (n=3), and hospitality providers (n=1). The employee populations in these organizations ranged from 134 to 13,000 in number. The employees' educational level ranged from high school graduates (30%),

some college (20%), associate degrees (30%), and undergraduate and above (20%). The ratio of employees to managers ranged from a high of 42 to 1 to the low of 3.5 to 1. The survey instrument was designed, after a thorough review of the literature, to elicit responses to questions relevant to the effectiveness of managers and the tools currently being used to rate that effectiveness. The instrument used to collect this data was developed specifically to encourage feedback on the rationale used to form these biases.

In-depth interviews were conducted where respondents were asked questions regarding the skill sets required of managers and the ability of managers to access necessary information to perform their respective jobs. Other questions were designed to determine the ability of employees to receive information and company directives outside of their perspective managers. The final portion of the interview was designed to gain an understanding from the respondents as to how they determine the effectiveness of managers in directing the activities of the employees and their effectiveness in the engagement process and communication skills. After the data was collected an analysis was performed to categorize the responses into fundamental themes.

IV. Results

The results were broken down into three areas: 1) management, 2) employees, and 3) organization. In each respective area, themes were developed common to the survey participants.

The first area of response was designed to see if managers had the necessary information and training to make decisions and inform employees of current company goals and objectives. The responses were narrowed to three common themes that define the manager's ability to direct employees. Table 1 shows the response to each question along with an indicator for (1) exceptional (2) average, or (3) indistinct (see Table 1). The results indicated that for the question of the manager awareness of company goals and objectives, 50% do an exceptional job of

providing the managers with information, 30% are average, and 20% provide indistinct support. To the question of manager training in communication and leadership skills, 30% do an exceptional job of providing necessary management training, 20% do an average job, and 50% provide indistinct support. Finally to the question of manager participation in policy making decisions, 40% rate exceptional for involving managers, 30% invite average participation and 30% are indistinct as to the managers role in policy making decisions.

The second area of response was designed to see if employees were given information about their work environment on a regular basis and options available to employees should they feel uninformed. The responses were narrowed to three common themes that define the manager's responsibility to employees. Table 2 shows the response to each question along with an indicator represent that is responsible: (1) direct supervisor, (2) executive management, or (3) other (see Table 2). To the question about how employees stay informed of current company/organization issues outside of their immediate supervisor, 50% still depend on their immediate supervisor for information while 50% rely on upper management. As for the question concerning awareness of policies and procedures, 70% rely on their direct supervisor while 10% receive information directly from upper management and 20% use other sources. Should employees have a grievance and desire to provide input on their work environment? Seventy percent are encouraged to go through their immediate supervisor, 10% may use upper management, and 20% are afforded alternative means.

Table 1: Management

Manager awareness of company goals and objectives	Manager training in communication and leadership skills	Manager participation in policy making decisions
We do have a couple of annual meetings where we included everybody (2)	We are supportive of continuing education efforts, college or classes outside of work (1)	They have input into them as it effects their responsibilities (2)
We do department manager meetings twice monthly (1)	We have a leadership academy where we glean people who are showing leadership potential and we bring them into this leadership academy (1)	If there are certain individual facility or unit based policies, it really is up to that individual manager to create that idea (3)
Some memos are sent out to all the departments on occasion (3)	We have an internship program for managers, and career development program (1)	Sometimes the executives don't know what is going on the floor, They rely quite a bit on the managers (1)
Managers can go up to the directors for a chat (2)	There is initial new manager training that they get, it really is just kind of the basics (3)	We actually write the policy and then they "tweak it" (3)
All managers at every level meet once a month and we go over events, concerns strategies, objectives (1)	When they first become a manager I send them to skill training (at UVU or Mountainland) (2)	I believe they are very involved in delegating that information to the directors of what the issues are that they are facing (1)
By the retreats, budget process and the meetings that are held every two weeks (1)	Usually they get the training specific to their area (3)	I am sure the department heads are pretty involved and are able to provide some input (2)
It is in the performance review process (3)	We have not done a lot of management training yet (3)	They play the biggest role. We have a process review team where all the mangers participate (1)
Employees receive a training everyday and then a department training once a month. Managers go through the same process (1)	Basic, the training is part of the monthly training (2)	They can propose policy changes, The board has the call (2)
In-service training (2)	The managers would receive leadership training based on each department programs or training budget (3)	During our monthly meetings if there are issues that are going on and we see that in all departments then we revise any current policy or procedure or look at it to see if it is effective or not (1)
We have business review meetings every month (1)	Each department has it's own training (3)	If there are certain Individual facility or unit based policies, it really is up to that individual manager to create that idea (3)

Table 2: Employees

How do employees stay informed of current company/organization issues outside of their immediate supervisor?	How do your employees find out about policies and procedures?	What do employees do if they have a grievance?
It is the managers responsibility(1)	I guess it is only as strong as the principle or supervisor (1)	If an employee has a problem they need to talk with their supervisor about it first (1)
They have to rely on their directors and supervisors to pass it down (1)	Handed down from managers to the employees (1)	Grievances are handled in the human resource department (2)
We actually aren't even updating the policies manually anymore, it is all on the web (2)	If new policies come out the supervisors are suppose to give the employees training on the new policies (2)	They can go either to their managers, supervisors or they can come directly to human resources (1)
We put it on computer on their time card so before they complete their time card at the end of the day or week, they have to read this memo (2)	When a new policy has been revised or created we give these to the directors and they are advised to review it with their department (2)	They have contact information in their handbook if they want to go directly to the corporate office and not report to us (3)
They attend the daily standup training (1)	They have it in the handbook (3)	They would go to their supervisor and then to the manager (1)
On an intranet site for the employees (2)	It is the managers responsibility (1)	We hope that if an individual has a difficulty that they can go to a manager and work that out with their manager (1)
We do not have a newsletter yet. They mainly learn through word of mouth and from the supervisor in their staff meetings (1)	Through HR. We email or meetings depending on how important the policy is (2)	They take the grievance to their supervisor and that the supervisor has a week to get back to them and check into it and get back to them (1)
I don't know that there is a formal method for that other than what the directors bring back (1)	They get that information at the team meetings, department meetings (1)	Grievance policy would be to try and resolve the grievance at the lowest Level (1)
We have electronic mail and written mail (2)	Through the association and Through the supervisors as well (1)	We have a grievance system for the employees (3)
I have a meetings with all the employees once a month (2)	New policies are explained in meetings (1)	They can tell any manager and or they tell me and the President of our company walks out and has a lunch once a month with employees and they can tell him (1)

The third and final area of response was designed to generate a general feeling, from a human resource director's point of view, as to the usefulness of using employee surveys of management as a tool in the overall evaluation process. The responses were narrowed to three common themes that define upper managements' views on this issue. Table 3 shows the responses to each question along with an indicator to represent a viewpoint with (1) positive, (2) average, or (3) negative overtone (see Table 3). The results from the question posed to human resource directors about the triggers they might see as valid to request an evaluation of managers indicated that 70 % found constructive reasons for its use, while 10% had average feelings and 20% felt they already address the question adequately. To the question of information that would be of value in determining a manager's effectiveness, 100% found information they would consider important feedback. The final question addressed each participant's feelings on their personal focus. Twenty percent had a positive reaction to the idea of a survey, while 30% felt that things were generally all right. Fifty percent reacted in a negative manner to the use of such a tool either because of a different perspective or from a negative experience.

Table 3: Company/Organization

What would prompt you to consider asking for an evaluation of front line managers?	What information about managers would you consider most helpful in determining the effectiveness of managers?	What else would you like me to know about your viewpoint on employee ratings of management?
I can generally walk by, stand outside the door for 2 or 3 minutes and I know what is going on in that room (3)	I think communication would be, how they give directions, how willing are they to receive suggestions (1)	An administrator may not be a really great administrator but everybody likes him (2)
Certainly if there were a lot of concerns that come through an ethics line or something like that (1)	Do the employees trust them, are they honest and forthright with their employees (1)	Often times when they are doing an evaluation they will rate them really high because they think they will get more out of them if they do (2)
It would be an employee coming into me and making me aware of a problem most likely (1)	Are they accomplishing the mission of the district(1)	My bias here is based on my own experience and it was one of the worse experiences I have ever had (3)
High flow of comments from the staff (1)	If they are following policy and procedure (1)	Sometimes it becomes a popularity contest (3)
If I was getting a lot of clamor from the public that indicated there was a lack of leadership (1)	Availability and communication (1)	I think it is very important that people know where they stand (1)
If I had a lot of exit interviews of people leaving the organization that indicated there was a communication problem (1)	If they are providing the type of service excellence that our guests expect and that these values are being communicated to the staff (1)	I did not feel like I could be honest, even though you might say this is anonymous and no one will ever know, this is a bunch of baloney (3)
Productivity could be another thing to look at (2)	We have a very diverse population so consistency would be a big one on mine, if all employees are treated the same way (1)	Are we really willing to take the time and invest the emotional and social capital that we need (3)
We do have an open line of communication here if an employee has a problem with their supervisor, the plant manager, floor manager their door is always open (3)	Were they clear with their expectations to the employees (1)	Hiring right, making good selections, probably more important in my mind than a secret tool for evaluation (3)
Grievances that come to my attention (1)	I would want to know if the supervisors are communicating (1)	It is not always the matter of good managers but sometimes the employees have to decide if they are a good fit themselves as well (2)
It would be an employee coming into me and making me aware of a problem most likely (1)	I would like to know if they are treating employees with respect and dignity (1)	How would that be to have the employees rate their managers? I don't know that it wouldn't be a good idea (1)

V. Discussion

This study has demonstrated that companies/organizations in the study group place a high value on managers having the necessary information vital to their goals and objectives. While making efforts to provide managers with information, many do not provide the extended leadership training that may be valuable in the dissemination of that information. In many instances, however, they do involve lower management in policymaking decisions. The study also shows that supervisors are heavily relied on to keep the employees informed of the organizations changing policies and procedures. Should employees have a grievance and desire to provide input on their work environment they are encouraged to use their immediate supervisor. This study has shown that a large number of human resource directors recognize some key factors that would prompt questions and promote a response by upper management concerning the actions of front line supervisors; however, no formal tool is currently in place to facilitate a response. All study participants found high value in feedback from employees. Even though employee feedback is recognized as useful, interestingly a significant number of respondents shared some form of negative reaction to the use of employees to actually rate the performance of their managers.

Employers in this study rely heavily on front line managers and supervisors; however, some disparity was noted with respect to leadership training. It is significant to note that training requirements for lower management is somewhat ambiguous between organizations. Employers realize that employee engagement by managers is vital and strive to keep managers well informed. The expectation that managers will pass this information to their employees is merely an assumption as no procedure is in general use to verify these actions. Company officials place a great deal of responsibility on lower management for the daily operation of the organization.

This is evidenced by the responsibility delegated to managers to engage employees and address workplace concerns.

All respondents placed a high value on employees and address workplace conditions proactively. General satisfaction surveys and some 360 evaluations have been done by the study group but no structured form of direct rating of managers was noted. Surprisingly many human resource directors had not given much thought to the use of employees to rate the performance of their managers. Some thought the idea would be of great value while a larger number expressed reasons not to use such a tool. The negative reaction by study participants to the use of employees to rate the performance of managers is interesting and forms a basis for further study. The general feeling observed when compiling the data was that most directors are not well informed as to the value of such a performance based informational tool. The literature presented shows great value and support by many organizations for the use of just such a tool. There are some limitations to consider in the generalizability of the results of this study. First, the possible reasons for resistance in the study group may be in the lack of knowledge relating to this type of survey. Other samples may have had more knowledge of the tool. Second, due to the limited size of the study group and lack of employee input, additional data may provide important implications not addressed in this study.

VI. Conclusion

While this research study only reveals a small percent of the opinions held in the business community concerning employee involvement in rating the effectiveness of managers, it does show that businesses are interested in the performance of their managers. Some perceptions were encountered about using the viewpoints of employees in this manner including concerns that organizational politics could possibly affect the study's outcome. This presents a number of

interesting questions worthy of further study. This study does demonstrate the need for Human Resource Managers to become more familiar with all the tools available in their efforts to better manage the workplace. I hope the results presented here will be of some use to organizations considering the use of employees as a contributing factor in determining the effectiveness of managers.

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