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ABSTRACT

The evaluation of professional support personnel (PSP)--counselors, school psychologists, nurses, curriculum specialists, library/media specialists, deans, and athletic directors--has received scant attention among researchers, theorists, and practicing administrators. This situation may reflect the inadequate tools for counselor and PSP evaluation along with the professional and legal limitations of direct observation of these personnel. However, the PSP Evaluation Model offers a thorough and comprehensive alternative to direct observation evaluations by drawing on multi-faceted data collection consisting of job artifacts collected in a portfolio along with input from multiple sources such as students, parents, peers, as well as the counselor or PSP staff members' self-evaluation. These multiple sources enable the counselor to document job performance--one of the seven steps in the PSP Evaluation Model. The first four steps involve identification of system and program needs, listing of job duties, selecting performance indicators, and setting performance standards. The remaining three steps, completed in cyclical fashion each appraisal period, include documenting performance, evaluation (a process in which the evaluation conference is central to the success of the enterprise), and improving or maintaining professional service. The PSP Evaluation Model should assist school personnel in sustaining or improving their services. Contains 17 references. (RJM)

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**MULTI-FACETED DATA COLLECTION:
The Key to Evaluating School Counselors
and Other Support Professionals**

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**Multi-faceted Data Collection:
The Key to Evaluating School Counselors
and Other Support Professionals**

Background

A review of evaluation literature discloses very little concerning the evaluation of professional support personnel -- all of the certificated non-teaching, non-administrative staff (such as counselors) who serve students, teachers, and/or other clients. If these educators have been evaluated at all, the process has been rare, inadequate or both; the appraisal instrument seldom reflects the duties of the position. In Wisconsin, a recent survey of 25% of all secondary school counselors, for example, revealed that only 17% were evaluated on the basis of explicit, *written* criteria designed specifically for counselor evaluation (Gorton & Olemacher, 1987). The largest proportion of the counselors in the study (38%) were evaluated with a *teacher* evaluation instrument that included criteria either inappropriate or inapplicable to the evaluation of counselors. In this same study, 34% of the counselors were evaluated informally, using no specific written criteria or procedures, and 26% reported no systematic counselor evaluation at all.

Evaluation of professional support personnel (not only counselors, but school psychologists, nurses, curriculum specialists, library/media specialists, deans and athletic directors) has not received much attention either among researchers and theorists or among practicing administrators; this may simultaneously reflect and contribute to the scanty and inadequate implementation of

counselor and PSP evaluation. If the literature is scant, so too is support from state education agencies. In the 1993 survey of states which updated a previous 1988 study, only 14 of the 41 states responding indicated that they provide guidelines to local schools regarding counselor evaluation; and only nine (9) states reported that they provide *training* for evaluators of school counselors (Stronge & Tucker, 1994).

There is, however, a model for evaluating counselors and other support personnel that was developed first for the Illinois State Board of Education (Stronge, 1988). This model was used by the Illinois Administrators Academy to in-service administrators with programs delivered by regional education agencies in response to a state mandate. Known as the PSP (Professional Support Personnel) Evaluation Model, it has since been elaborated on and presented in a larger theoretical and historical context in Stronge and Helm's *Evaluating Professional Support Personnel in Education* (1991). These two researchers have also been participating in Project CREATE (Center for Research on Educational Accountability and Teacher Evaluation), funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Research and Improvement. In this project, they are working to refine the PSP model based on feedback from both evaluation experts and professional educators in the field, which is one reason for presenting this symposium today: in part to disseminate information about the model as it currently exists and in part to obtain additional feedback concerning the perceived strengths and weaknesses of the model.

The PSP Evaluation Model contains little that is startlingly new or different, when each of the components is considered individually. We have drawn heavily from the best evaluation theory found in the literature and from the best practice uncovered by surveys and literature searches. And while the model was developed specifically for professional support personnel, we believe it offers a uniquely strong approach to the evaluation of all educators -- classroom teachers and administrators as well as counselors and other professional support personnel.

The 7 Steps of the PSP Evaluation Model

The PSP Evaluation Model consists of seven (7) steps. It is, in keeping with sound evaluation theory, cyclical in nature. That is, the last step in the first evaluation cycle becomes or leads into the first step of the next cycle. We wish to emphasize, however, that the first four steps are primarily a one time exercise. While they require a major investment of time and energy, once completed, they need only be "revisited" periodically in order to update in light of changes in the school/district's needs, the program, or the position.

****Step 1 is to identify system needs.*** This is essential because the philosophy underlying the model is that all personnel should be performing in ways that will enable the school (district/program) to achieve its goals and mission. Therefore, the system and program needs must be clearly identified. More specifically, this entails 1) examination of current programs and personnel and 2) assessment of future needs, both short term and long term. Most if

not all of these endeavors are completed with some regularity to meet requirements for state approval and/or accrediting agencies.

***Step 2 is to identify the duties of the position.** Good performance evaluation in the 1990s bears little resemblance to performance evaluation of a couple decades ago or more when evaluators focused primarily on the "traits" of the teacher or educator, such as appearance, enthusiasm, dedication, etc. And although much teacher evaluation in the 1980s was based (somewhat erroneously) on Madeline Hunter's effective teaching behaviors and elements of lesson design, this approach cannot be implemented with counselors and other PSP staff because it still relies primarily on direct observation of classroom teaching. In fact, one recent national survey (Educational Research Service, 1988) found that 99.8% of the public schools responding used direct classroom observation as the primary data collection technique.

Sound performance evaluation for counselors and other professional support personnel simply *must* be applied to the duties an individual performs in the context of his or her job. The list of duties should be determined jointly by the school counselor and the supervisor -- either a principal or a personnel director/assistant superintendent. This list will in most instances be a more detailed compilation of duties derived from a job description, which is likely to be too general for evaluative purposes.

Typical duties for school counselors might include, in the area of administration, for example:

- ◆ *Implements and coordinates schoolwide counseling services and activities.*
- ◆ *Maintains an organized, functional, current counseling center.*

Or in the area of consultation, some sample duties might include:

- ◆ *Presents instructional/informational programs to groups of students, parents, teachers, and other school and community personnel.*
- ◆ *Interprets test data to assist school staff with curriculum planning.*

Once a representative list of significant duties has been constructed, the counselor and supervisor are ready for the next step in the evaluation process.

***Step 3 is to select performance indicators.** Performance indicators are the "observable, measurable units of performance that can be documented...." (Stronge & Helm, 1991, p. 130). They are selected on the basis of their representativeness of broader categories of performance. Are they like performance objectives or behavioral objectives? If not, how are they different? Perhaps when combined with the performance standards set in step 4, they share many characteristics with behavioral or performance objectives. However, too often in the past, the latter have been an end in themselves, whereas in the PSP model, the performance indicators and performance standards can only be a part of the larger process, i.e., the means to an end, which is clearly identified from the beginning as improved performance for the benefit of the

larger system and the students it serves. Some sample performance indicators (PIs) for the duties listed above include:

DUTY: *Implements and coordinates schoolwide counseling services and activities.*

PI: *Organizes and conducts special events such as "career day," "college night."*

DUTY: *Maintains an organized, functional...counseling center.*

PI: *Displays information on bulletin boards, tables, etc.*

DUTY: *Presents instructional/informational programs....*

PI: *Conducts programs for improvement of student study skills;
OR Conducts teacher in-service based upon assessed need.*

DUTY: *Interprets test data to assist school staff with curriculum planning.*

PI: *Assists in curriculum revision based on test results.*

The number of performance indicators utilized with a given duty will vary with the importance and nature of that duty. The important consideration is that both counselor and supervisor develop these performance indicators jointly and that those developed are the most reflective indicators that the duty has been performed.

***Step 4: Set performance standards.** A standard is a predetermined level of desired or acceptable results (Stronge & Helm, 1991, p.146). It must be stated in terms of observable, measurable behavior; like a behavioral objective, it should whenever possible include specifics such as location, time

allotment, accepted rate of accuracy -- with the caveat that such specifications must be justifiable and realistic, not arbitrary. Too often, this step is slighted in performance evaluation. But after identifying the duties and the indicators of performing those duties, it is essential to specify not only whether the duties have been performed but also *how well they have been performed*. This process requires careful consideration and the greatest clarity possible. The choice of terms -- e.g., unsatisfactory or needs improvement; satisfactory or meets expectations; excellent or outstanding or exceeds standards -- may be mandated by the state or by local school board policy. Given the terms, however, the counselor and supervisor will need to define those terms contextually and operationally. What level of performance constitutes "satisfactory" performance or "unsatisfactory" performance? The answer to this question lies in the identification of those factors mentioned above; it will include both quantitative and qualitative considerations.

***Step 5 is to document job performance.** Here is where the PSP model offers a viable alternative to the teacher evaluation procedures that rely so heavily on direct observation, which is, of course, of limited usefulness in counselor evaluation. In documenting job performance, multiple sources of data will be collected. These sources fall into two categories: 1) job artifacts, collected primarily by the counselor in a portfolio and 2) input from other individuals with whom the counselor has contact during her or his job performance.

The documentation will be collected throughout the appraisal period by both the counselor and the supervisor. If both maintain folders specifically for that purpose, they can simply enter documents, notes, or survey instruments as those items are developed or used. It is important that they include only those artifacts or other items that directly document some aspect of the counselor's performance -- and generally, items that significantly document that performance. The importance of guidelines for including and for evaluating the documentation are discussed below.

***Step 6 is to evaluate performance.** Too often in many school evaluation procedures, this is either the first or second step of the process. In the PSP evaluation model, however, the evaluation is the heart of the entire process. The vehicle for conducting the evaluation is the evaluation conference -- called a performance review or performance appraisal interview in the business world. (While this writer has always had reservations about applying business principles to the field of education, it does appear educators have much to learn from the business world about conducting evaluation conferences.) An evaluation conference may be a part of either formative or summative evaluation -- preferably both. It should be one component of on-going feedback from the supervisor about the employee's performance rather than an annual, one-time event (Johnson, 1979; King, 1984; Buzzotta, 1989; Zemke, 1991; Longenecker & Goff, 1990). When this is the case, the evaluation conference will hold no surprises and should cause little if any anxiety for either the evaluator or the evaluatee.

The purposes of an evaluation conference are multiple, for the conference offers an opportunity to look at both the past and the future of both the individual evaluatee and the larger program (i.e., counseling) and school/district. The discussion will focus on goals and objectives previously set, and the possible reasons some of them might not have been fully met. It provides an opportunity for the supervisor to recognize good performance and communicate suggestions for improvement. If there is trust between the individuals, misunderstanding and misinformation can be prevented or corrected during this conversation. An effective evaluation conference will also be used for problem solving, as the two individuals discuss the job in the context of the organization and its mission and needs. Obviously, if the employee is having performance difficulties, the conference provides a more formal means of warning the individual and offering recommendations for remediation. Finally, the evaluation conference and the completed evaluation instrument that will reflect the discussion provide a permanent record of the employee's performance at that point, offering a legally defensible basis for personnel decisions.

****Step 7 is to improve/maintain professional service.*** The culmination of the appraisal cycle is, by definition of a cycle, also the entree into the following evaluation cycle (Stronge, 1994). Following the final, summative evaluation, the counselor and supervisor have a clear picture of the counselor's past performance and the areas which need additional effort, reflecting either room for improvement in the counselor's performance or newly identified system needs.

Encompassed within this step are a variety of personnel decisions ranging from termination of unsatisfactory employees, transfers, or provision of assistance to marginal employees, to individualized professional development plans that expand the counselor's knowledge base or skills level. It may also involve setting new goals or objectives or redefining programs or job descriptions.

Multi-Faceted Data Collection

The "job artifacts" (McGreal, Broderick & Jones, 1984) are documents and records developed and/or used by the counselor in the course of fulfilling his or her duties. Such artifacts might include, for example, logs of student appointments, handouts and lesson plans for group counseling activities, forms designed by the counselor for use in obtaining or recording information, reports written and submitted for district or state use, and calendars or schedules of activities. Input from individuals with whom the counselor or other PSP staff member works can be obtained through questioning, either with a survey instrument or by interviewing. These constituencies may include peers (teachers and other professionals with whom the counselor works directly), students, and parents, as well as the counselor being evaluated. The assumption, of course, is that only those having direct experience with the counselor in his or her job capacity would be surveyed or asked for input. All respondents should be assured of confidentiality; only the compiled results of any surveys would be shared with the counselor by the supervisor who collects the information.

The idea of including input from students, parents and other teachers may at first be disconcerting to counselors accustomed to evaluation only by a supervisor, if they have been evaluated at all. It may also seem a bit foreign to the principal or personnel director responsible for evaluating the counselor. However, the use of multiple sources of input and assessment strengthens and enriches the final evaluation, as is evident for the following reasons:

1. Multiple sources increase the validity of the evaluation.
2. Multiple sources increase the reliability of the evaluation.
3. Multiple sources decrease the subjectivity of the evaluation.
4. Multiple sources expand the performance profile.
5. Multiple sources facilitate evaluation of quality as well as quantity.
6. Multiple sources build a more legally defensible record for personnel decision-making.
7. Multiple sources, in short, are more appropriate for professionals whose jobs are multi-faceted.

[For a useful discussion of the advantages and potential liabilities of involving each of the five parties in evaluation (supervisor, peers, subordinates, self, and outsiders), see Cummings & Schwab, in Baird et al., 1982; and Mohrman, Resnick-West, and Lawler III, 1989.]

How to Evaluate the Data

Sound evaluation theory in general and the PSP Evaluation Model in particular require that standards and performance criteria must be established prior to any documentation. The counselor or other PSP staff member must

know, preferably from the first day of employment, on what basis he or she will be evaluated. This requirement not only reflects the good faith and fairness of the supervising personnel but protects the supervisor, the school administration and the school board in the event of a legal challenge to any employment decisions based on performance evaluation.

Job Artifacts The quality of the job artifacts should be determined by three considerations (McGreal, Broderick & Jones, 1984):

- ◆ content
- ◆ design
- ◆ presentation

In looking at **content** (meaning), the evaluator will consider such factors as the validity, appropriateness, relevance of the artifact to the task, ability of the artifact to motivate the receiver/user to cooperate or participate, and finally, the clarity and conciseness of the artifact. Assessing the **design** of an artifact requires judging the appropriateness of the medium used, the relevance and meaningfulness of the artifact for the objective it was designed to achieve, the sequencing of the artifact, its ability to invite or engage the receiver, and the existence of a plan for evaluating the artifact's effectiveness. Finally, the evaluator must consider the **presentation** -- the physical and aesthetic aspects of the artifact, as well as directions for its use. Is the artifact suitable for the time allotted? Are directions clearly explained? Is the artifact uncluttered and visually attractive? Does it present all the significant details? In all of these

three major factors (design, content, presentation), however, the evaluator must always look for a connection with the counselor's duties; each artifact must document the fulfillment of some job responsibility or duty. And the total "portfolio" should reflect some principle of organization, rather than be haphazardly thrown together.

Surveys When the supervisor is assessing the data obtained by questioning individuals (from several constituencies) with whom the counselor works, s/he must look at "the forest, not the trees." That is, the supervisor will try to identify overall strengths and areas needing improvement, keeping in mind that there are always some individuals providing input who are consistently critical of everyone or who might have a personality conflict with the counselor or who might have had some professional disagreement -- any one of which could affect their objectivity. However, to the extent that the instrument for obtaining such feedback focuses on specific counselor duties and performance indicators rather than on personality traits, the above named situations will have minimal negative impact. Also, those surveyed for input should include only those with first hand contact with the counselor; whether all individuals in a given constituency or a representative sampling of that constituency is surveyed will depend on the number of persons involved. Finally, we add the reminder that if the survey instrument or list of questions has been jointly developed by the counselor and supervisor, both should feel reasonably comfortable with the data obtained with the form.

The Evaluation Conference

While the guidelines for conducting an effective evaluation conference are really the subject of another presentation/article, we will offer a brief overview here to stimulate some awareness of the possibilities. To ensure a successful evaluation conference, not only should the evaluator prepare in advance but s/he should assist the counselor or PSP staff member in preparing also.

How do they prepare for an evaluation conference? The evaluator establishes a mutually convenient time, date and place for the conference, preferably at least a week ahead of time. He or she suggests that the counselor conduct a self-appraisal, perhaps with a copy of the evaluation instrument. The counselor may also be asked to identify or highlight major accomplishments, goals achieved, and obstructions to effective performance during the evaluation period. The artifacts or documents collected by the counselor during the appraisal period should be submitted to the evaluator for review prior to the evaluation conference.

The best evaluation conferences, according to the literature, are "those in which the employees do most of the talking and accurately appraise their own performance" (Webb, 1989). This, of course, presupposes an understanding of the structure of the conference, which focuses on specific achievements, behaviors, deficiencies, and the context in which employee goals or tasks were met or not met. It also presupposes careful planning, collecting and organizing of information and preliminary analysis of performance. The supervisor's ability

to ask open-ended questions that begin with "When" "Which" "How many" or "How" (Alexander Hamilton Institute, 1989) will elicit more meaningful responses by the evaluatee. "Please explain that," "Give me the details," or "Tell me more about that," will draw out a reticent employee.

The conference should begin with the employee's successes and strengths, but when it comes time to shift to problem areas, the evaluator might ask "Which parts of the job gave you the most difficulty? And why?" Or, continuing to focus on the situation rather than the individual, the supervisor might ask, "Which objectives did you have the most difficulty fulfilling? What conditions or events made it difficult?" (Stronge & Helm, 1991, p. 208). If the counselor is perhaps relying too heavily on excuses based on external factors, it may be necessary to shift the line of questioning: "Is there anything you might have done differently to bring you closer to achieving this objective?" All this emphasis on evaluatee talk may seem foreign -- if not outright strange -- to educators who are used to heavily supervisor dominated conferencing. Yet the business and human services sectors almost universally recommend that employee talk comprise anywhere from 75%-90% of the conference (Alexander Hamilton Institute, 1989; Umiker, 1992).

Structuring the evaluation conference as described above has the advantage, in most instances, of giving the employee an opportunity to cite his or her deficiencies and areas needing improvement. Were the same performance problems cited by the evaluator, the employee would be more susceptible to the natural tendency toward defensiveness. This approach also raises the

comfort level for the evaluator, since few actually enjoy directly confronting a subordinate about any performance problems. Nevertheless, it should go without saying that the supervisor will compare the counselor's self-appraisal with that of the supervisor him/herself. Accomplishments and successes should receive warm recognition and approval; if improvements are in order, the evaluator may ask "What can we do to improve your performance?" or "What would you like to work on during the next appraisal period to enhance your performance further?" (Stronge & Helm, 1991, 209). Perhaps goals and objectives for the next appraisal period will be jointly determined at this time.

It hardly needs to be added that the dynamics of the evaluation conference will vary with the ages and amount of experience of the counselor/employee and the supervisor, as well as with the level of competence demonstrated by the employee. Whatever the specifics, however, when the evaluation conference has concluded, both individuals should have a clear idea of the assessment to be made by the evaluator. The evaluation form should only be completed in its final form by the evaluator after the conference.

SUMMARY

In the evaluation of school counselors and other professional support personnel, direct observation has serious professional and legal limitations. The PSP Evaluation Model offers a thorough and comprehensive alternative to evaluation based on direct observation: multi-faceted data collection, consisting of job artifacts collected in a portfolio and input from multiple sources such as students, parents, peers (teachers and other educators) as well as the counsel-

or or PSP staff member's self-evaluation. The data collected from these multiple sources enable the counselor to document job performance, which is one of the seven steps in the PSP Evaluation Model. The first four are primarily one time activities, involving identification of system and program needs, listing of job duties and performance indicators and setting standards for judging the quality of the performance. The remaining three steps, completed in cyclical fashion each appraisal period, include documenting performance, evaluating (a process in which the evaluation conference is central to the success of the enterprise), and improving or maintaining professional service. The PSP Evaluation Model, in short, is designed to assist school personnel, both counselors/professional support personnel and supervisors, in achieving the goal of the organization: to continually sustain or improve its educational programs and services.

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