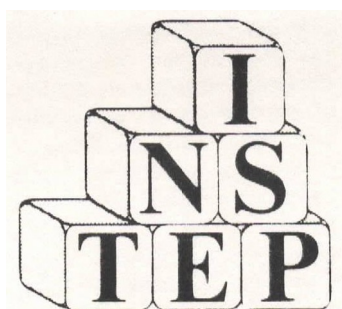


# HOW AM I DOING?

## -----Shared Self Assessment

James Kilty, Lecturer in Adult Education at the University of Surrey and Co-ordinator of the Human Potential Research Project, describes a practical method of reviewing performance based on individual self-assessment shared with members of a peer group



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receive support from others as they confront their own areas of weakness, as well as strength.

### Background

The method has arisen out of a number of considerations: firstly, that there are many people who work relatively independently of others with the same role (certain professionals, entrepreneurs, senior managers), or for whom there are no clearly established criteria against which to judge their effectiveness. Secondly that every person develops in skill and expertise primarily through their own self-directed learning — which includes self-assessment.

In practice, people learn in co operation with others and often discuss their learning and performance difficulties with chosen colleagues. Commitment to change arises from an individual's personal conviction of the need for change, not solely from demands by others to do so.

Thus, the method described provides a forum for a real debate about criteria of quality and standards of excellence, which does not arise often enough in day to day working life. It assumes a much greater emphasis on self-assessment than is traditionally the case. It also assumes that assessment by others can be used to help modify the original self-assessment, if presented in an acceptable style. This view is being found increasingly attractive as more groups explore the methodology and its underlying values.

The following steps form a logical order in the process of self and peer assessment. They also reduce the likelihood of conflict arising between close colleagues if they are followed in order, and if the steps which involve shared self assessment and peer comment are managed appropriately,

The method of self and peer assessment described here provides a new means for managers, trainers or practitioners in any field to assess the effectiveness of their performance at work. It enables groups of people with similar roles to examine their performance critically by drawing on their collective experience.

This particular method was first introduced by John Heron, as a result of his work with the Human Potential Research Project at the University of Surrey and at the British Post-graduate Medical Federation.<sup>1</sup> In the last five years it has been applied by an increasing number of facilitators, including myself, in a variety of forms with various different groups. These groups have been drawn from a wide range of occupations, both professional and voluntary, including health care professionals and their trainers, managers, teachers, counsellors, youth officers and youth and community tutors. It has the benefit of being equally applicable to both students and experienced practitioners. The method can be applied over a period of time (and repeated as many times as the group requires) using

particular tools developed by the group, to monitor and assess daily performance, review assessments and methods of assessment, and refine and develop these. It comprises a series of activities designed to cover each element in the assessment process; the content of each step being decided by group members in the light of their particular areas of expertise.

The procedure has a twofold aim: to reduce the understandable fears and anxieties about having others scrutinise performance; and to overcome the inevitable reluctance to talk about performance and the accompanying suspicion about how others will react. It is designed to open up a real dialogue about performance in which individuals

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**1 Choose an area of practice.** The group selects an area of practice it wishes to assess, perhaps by 'brainstorming' several possible areas first.) The chosen area should be non-contentious for the first experience, in order to become acquainted with the method. For people who do not work closely together this should be a central area of practice, which either symbolises or encompasses major job functions. Areas we have worked with include the technical (performing essential tasks), interpersonal (counselling skills, group leadership) and personal (managing time, reactions to stress); or the last two together (managing self and others in periods of conflict).

**2 Decide on criteria of quality.** The measures of performance are defined by the group, drawing on the members' experience. Such criteria may be the answers to questions such as 'What skills and attitudes do we need to perform this role, or function well?' or 'What qualities are required?' These criteria will help members define levels of performance at least minimally acceptable to them as individuals and to the group.

**3 Devise self-monitoring and self-assessment mechanisms.** Since the next stage involves individually monitoring performance over a period of time and assessing its quality against the criteria and standards selected, some measuring instrument or information gathering tool is required. This is developed by the group to suit the purpose of the exercise. Examples have included: subjective diary notes; a numerical rating for each assessment together with case-notes for report to the group; products of work; and formal institutional records of work. In some cases a review has been carried out at the end of selected days; in others, random assessments have been made as a result of prompting by colleagues.

**4 Application in daily working life.** The method devised is applied over an agreed period of time, either in private or with a peer.

**5 Review application.** This is particularly helpful in the early stages, especially as under pressure

of work people forget to apply the method or review the tools developed.

**6 Share self assessments.** This is the start of the most critical phase in the whole procedure, when members disclose to their colleagues their own appraisals, supported by examples which may be anecdotal data or accounts of successes or critical incidents. We have found it best to discourage interruption by those listening, and to encourage frankness.

**7 Receive reactions from peers.** We have developed a range of possible ground-rules to manage the process of peer appraisal. These are selected by the group, according to the degree of toughness and challenge appropriate to the level of confidence of group members and their skill in drawing out colleagues, offering evaluations or confronting each other. Examples include: asking clarifying questions; agreeing or disagreeing with elements of the shared self appraisal; and giving negative and positive feedback. They are described more fully in other publications.<sup>3</sup>

This part of the process needs careful management to pre-empt attack-defence responses. These can mar the process and reduce the likelihood that individuals will learn and improve the quality of their work as a result of the review. Where close colleagues are involved, the working relationships between particular individuals may need to be examined following the disclosures and comments so that conflicts between them may be carefully resolved. This stage is best facilitated by a person experienced in human relations training.

**8 Review self assessment: make action plans.** Each individual reviews and modifies, if necessary, his own assessment in the light of colleagues' comments. He also identifies any changes he wishes to make in his practice and devises plans to implement these changes.

**9 Review methodology.** Ultimately, the whole procedure is revised and refined by the group in the light of their experience of it. We encourage groups to continue the process themselves and develop methods appropriate to their own settings.

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## 'Commitment to change arises from an individual's personal conviction of the need for change, not from demands by others.'

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We have experience of performance assessment in teams where immediate line managers are involved and in professions where the newly qualified are being trained by more experienced members. We have no experience of situations where very senior managers or others wish to scrutinise the criteria, standards and results developed by a team or group and wish to criticise these.

In cases where this has happened, the effect on the group has been to undermine individuals' security in carrying out the self-discipline of the process and to inhibit self-directed change. We have always persuaded such people to suggest additions or comment constructively — the group being free to reject these suggestions.

The degree to which the process would need to be modified in a typical organisation needs exploration. In the one application with a Youth Service team, the relationships were so supportive that the method worked well. Indeed, it seems likely that the method may succeed in improving the effectiveness of a team only if the relationships are already sufficiently supportive that individuals feel able to talk with confidence in support of others, and in the belief that they would keep such confidences

### References

- 1 Heron, J., 'Behaviour Analysis in Education and Training', Human Potential Research Project, 1977; Dimensions of Facilitator Style, HPRP, 1977; Assessment', HPRP, 1981
- 2 Gordon, W.W., 'Synectics, Harper & Row, 1961
- 3 Kilty, J., 'Self and Peer Assessment', Human Potential Research Project, 1979; Boud D.T. and Kilty, J., 'Self appraisal; an Approach to Academic Professional Development', Society for Research in Higher Education, University of Surrey, 1982

James Kilty is prepared to conduct one or more workshops along the lines suggested in this article. Preferably, these workshops would involve people who could then put the method into practice, after discussing modifications arising out of the training experience.