Faculty evaluation is an area that is of great interest to me. I am interested because I am a faculty member, because I teach management and one of the jobs of any manager is to evaluate people, and primarily because I believe in excellence. Evaluations, done well, will enhance an individual's desire to work toward excellence. Evaluations, done poorly, will likely be a strong deterrent to reaching excellence. The impact of the evaluation should not be underestimated.

I am not an expert in this area. But I do not know anybody who is an expert in the area. Although evaluations that are done well have always stimulated high performance, administrators and faculty members have become increasingly concerned about them only in recent years. Evaluation in an academic setting is more complex than in the private sector because productivity is more difficult to measure. But when justification of budget requests is difficult and when we say we have an outstanding department or college and are asked to prove it, then we must talk about evaluation. The glory years of universities are over. Many people and especially legislators are suspicious of what they are getting for their dollars. And yet, a university is not a monolith. While some departments are struggling to survive, other departments are finding that the demands for their time and resources are increasing at a rapid rate. Although this may sound unusual, I believe that the departments in the latter category should be more concerned with evaluation than those in the former. That is because well planned evaluations are vital for a department to meet the increased needs of a diverse set of clientele. Based on my knowledge of the activities at Mississippi State University and my own interest as an amateur horticulturist, I believe that you people are in departments which are experiencing great demands for a wide variety of activities and yet the resources available to meet these demands are not growing proportionately. That means we must examine what we do as individual members of a department and also as a department collectively.

I would like to discuss four aspects of the evaluation: 1) what time period should be covered, 2) how formalized should the process be, 3) what tools are available, and 4) who should do the evaluating. My format will be to talk about how universities are doing it, how they could be doing it, and then if you will bear with me, I would like to dream a little at the end.

Time period covered

My greatest concern in the evaluation process is that we only evaluate the past. Your reaction may be that we can't evaluate the future. You are correct. However, evaluation implies some comparison between what was done and what could have been done. If we want faculty to perform well, then those faculty members should know what is meant by "well" so that they may focus their attentions and efforts in a direction that is congruent with those desired. This past spring at Mississippi State, we had a universitywide formal evaluation required for the first time since I have been here. The entire focus was on what I had done. From a series of questions which I answered in the presence of my department chairman, he and I agreed on an overall evaluation of my past performance. The problem is that I may have performed well in some areas that are not so important to our department and perhaps less well in some vital areas. There was no requirement in the evaluation process to discuss what I should focus on during an upcoming period. My department chairman and I did discuss this, but I am sure that this was not done in many departments. Unfortunately, without a discussion of the future, I would be likely to work harder in some areas where I did not perform well even if they were not primary goals of the department as a unit.

I am not suggesting that we ignore the past. Obviously pay, promotion, and tenure will be based on past performance. What I am suggesting is that if we wish to improve future performance, we must identify those relevant areas. And by "we," I mean members of the department must identify those areas with inputs from those individuals and groups with whom we will interact in the future. Does your department have goals? Have the members of the department been encouraged to indicate their interests and strengths? Have all of the members of the department discussed how they may interact with each other, and reinforce each other within the framework of the department's goals so that each member of the department understands what is important, what is less important, and what is not important? That is the beginning step in the evaluation process.

There are a number of studies which suggest that individuals work much harder to achieve group goals if they believe they have had some input. That doesn't mean their ideas will always prevail. It means that there must be meaningful discussion within the department of where we want to be at some point in time.

This is extremely important when a department is heavily constrained by the resources available. We can't do everything. Therefore, we must choose. And these choices must be well thought out. That means evaluation must have a future orientation.

Formalization of the process

Second, how formalized should the evaluation process be? Let me give you an example of a school that I know that uses a future orientation and a very formalized evaluation. The faculty members do research, teach classes, and provide service to clientele within and without the university. Under stimulus from a very aggressive dean, the faculty members have evaluated approximately 50 journals. Some journals are rated higher than others. A faculty member knows that his research will be evaluated by multiplying a rating for a journal times the number of times the faculty member appeared in that journal and then summing this across all journals. Each faculty member then has a number of research points. Although the teaching and service activities are not quite as formally evaluated, scores are obtained on each of these areas also. The teaching activities are partially evaluated by using the average overall student evaluation times the number of students taught. However, this is then supplemented by an informal peer evaluation, and evaluation by the department chairman to obtain points for teaching. Since service activities may be with such a wide variety of groups, the school's members have only included in their list the more prominent ones. Once again the amount of time spent with groups of different importance is used to develop service points. When all of these are added together, through a weighting formula developed by the department members, an individual may easily see his total score. Each faculty member is then given a rank order list of the scores of all faculty members in his department.

Now, this school has a future orientation. Each faculty member may easily see how many points are assigned for what and from that can determine how to spend his time. Yet, the morale at that particular school is not very high. First, the faculty members are competing against one another and not working with each other. This results in a loss of the synergy that is supposed to result from the collegiate atmosphere. Second, many faculty members no longer perform, or perform only superficially, those tasks which are not measured. Do you spend any time with undergraduates who are having any difficulty? Do you work with graduate students in designing research projects? Do you meet the interested amateurs in the field of horticulture? In the atmosphere described above, you are likely to find that these activities will decrease unless they can be somehow translated into points. At the other extreme is another school I know. In this school the only evaluation perceptible to the faculty member is in the paycheck, the promotion, or tenure. And yet none of the inputs into these decisions are shared with the faculty member.

That school currently has a law suit from a minority faculty member who was denied promotion to full professor. His complaint is that not only does he not know the variables used in the decision, he doesn't even know who made the decision. The outcome of the law suit is unknown at this time, but my guess is that he has a good chance of winning. His lawyer points out that the evaluation is too formalized and too absolute and therefore harmful to a school that wants to be innovative. However, it is a fact that his school has excellent performance. It would appear some formalization is necessary, but the individual or individuals doing the evaluating must have some latitude to allow some consideration of those variables that are not easily measured and yet important for a department to function well. For example, I believe that a faculty member should do some research, do some teaching, and provide some service. The research publica-
tions are the best proxy we currently have to determine if a faculty member is up to date. Good teaching represents an interaction between good knowledge and good interpersonal style. Service represents the knowledge of a faculty member applied to the needs of the clientele. Yet students and other clientele can be prime stimuli for good research. Therefore, it seems to me that a faculty member should be involved in all three. But rather than count points, we should allow the faculty member to submit a report of all activities performed during an academic year and then meet and discuss with the department chairman and possibly others how these activities helped the department achieve the previously designated goals which the department set for that year.

What I am suggesting is that the process should neither be completely formalized nor completely informal. If the objectives of the department have been set in advance, then it is important that the faculty member and the department chairman have an opportunity to discuss the formalized inputs in an informal manner. If both know what the goals were, then there is likely to be greater congruence about the contribution of the faculty member to that department. We must communicate. But that communication at the end of the evaluation period is substantially enhanced by good communication at the beginning of the period.

Tools available

There are a variety of tools available which you might examine in any personnel management textbook. Therefore, rather than discuss at length specific tools, I wish to make a major point about the choice of tools. Many evaluators have not clarified in their own mind the purpose of the evaluation before choosing the tool or tools to perform the evaluation. Those tools which are most appropriate for pay-tools where we can add up points coming from a variety of dimensions (weighed checklists, paired comparisons, etc.)—are least appropriate for developmental purposes where the focus should be not on a checklist of adjectives but on areas that need development. These can best be done in essay form where the emphasis is on description of strengths and weaknesses and suggestions for capitalizing on the former and improving on the latter. These cannot be easily translatable into point forms. Therefore, before you decide on which tool or tools you are going to use, make sure you understand the purpose of the particular evaluation at that particular time. It is possible to have more than one “evaluation” per time period.

I might just digress for a moment to discuss the evaluation of teaching. Good teaching is important. During the late 1960’s there was a great push for student evaluations. We were all a little gunshy of students. I have suggested that good teaching represents an interaction between knowledge and interpersonal style. And yet students may focus more on interpersonal style than on the knowledge disseminated. One study demonstrated that in the principles of economics sections at a large university, there was a direct correlation between faculty rating and grades handed out and an inverse correlation between knowledge disseminated and faculty rating. The conclusion of the article was that if the correlations were carried to the logical extreme, the highest ratings were obtained by teaching nothing and giving all A’s. I am not suggesting that being an entertainer isn’t important. It probably is. The problem is that many students focus only on this and not on the knowledge.

And yet, particularly in state supported institutions, teaching must be important. Students who do not believe they are getting anything worthwhile may have greater indirect influence on a legislator than the president of the university at the budget hearings with all of his facts and figures. I believe that students’ evaluations may be part of the input into teaching, but only a small part. I would believe that if all of the faculty members in the department were to rate their peers on teaching, there would be great congruence and probably greater validity than the student evaluation.

Service activities are also important to you. From what I might call a low grade service activity may come substantial research opportunity and great benefit to the department and the university. Therefore, it is important. In the field of horticulture, service is of particular importance. I might say parenthetically that you may have created many of your own problems by your service activities. You do them well and have created a demand for research, teaching, and continued service activities that have far outstripped your resources.

The choice of tools to evaluate service is once again a function of the purpose of the evaluation. We will assume for a moment that you do your service activities well and do a lot. The basic purpose of the evaluation should be for the members of the department to determine if there is a match between the service activities which are believed to be important and the capabilities and interests of the members of the department collectively. This attempt at matching should provide a good method of evaluating what types of groups are to be served and what skills are available for the service activities to be performed. If some of the skills and knowledge are lacking, then the department members should be prepared to develop those skills.

Who does the evaluation?

The last facet of the evaluation process is who should do it. There are a variety of approaches: the immediate superior, the immediate superior and his superior, peers, subordinates, or even outsiders. First, we do use subordinates in some of the teaching evaluation. We do use outsiders when they review papers for meetings and articles for journals. Often tenured members of a department vote on tenure for new people. Moreover, the department chairman and probably the dean are involved also. In any personnel textbook the first recommendation is that to who should do the evaluating is that it should be done by a variety of people. We have that built into university evaluations already. It is now a question of emphasis. My belief is that each of these potential evaluators will likely reinforce the evaluations of the other evaluators if the goals and objectives are spelled out ahead of time. First, we have better communication. The individual himself has a framework for evaluation that is congruent with each of the others. Therefore, those high performers will be recognized across a variety of measurement dimensions. If department members will communicate before the fact, the appropriate mix of evaluators is not likely to be a problem.

Dreams

I would like to conclude with the department I dream about. My current department has one individual who is an outstanding researcher, well recognized in the management discipline. Another individual has made substantial contributions to the professional organizations of management by spending long hours arranging professional meetings, editing the proceedings, and so forth. Another member does a substantial amount of management training and does it extremely well. Several others are excellent teachers. Wouldn’t it be interesting if each individual was allowed to pursue his strengths and interests without having to meet a requirement that each individual teach 12 hours per week with all other activities done in the time remaining.

Remember that I have already suggested that I believe that all faculty members should do some research, do some teaching, and provide some service activities. But wouldn’t it be an exciting department if each faculty member met some agreed upon minima in each of these three areas and then was encouraged to pursue the areas of interest and strength to the fullest to meet the department goals. The true collegiate atmosphere would be brought to fruition. Intrinsic rewards rather than extrinsic rewards would dominate the individual. Evaluation would become a method of reinforcing excellence rather than a meeting required once a year which everybody dreads.

Evaluation begins at recruitment time. We are trying at that time to match goals and people. I hope that evaluation procedures used will focus on development and goals. What is past is past; we can learn from the past. We must live in the future.