IMPROVING EVALUATION

FORMS OF INDUSTRY

PROGRAMS

by

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Dept. of Agricultural Economics

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Abstract

The Center for Food and Agricultural Business at Purdue University has improved its evaluation forms to better gather the information needed by the educational team (instructors, program managers, marketing managers). The investigators interviewed staff, instructors and other/similar educational providers to determine the information the evaluation forms need to collect. In depth literature research has also helped determine better what was done elsewhere. Several conclusions have been drawn as a result of this work. First, the evaluation forms used have been redesigned and improved. Secondly, the investigators realized that an evaluation form was not the only assessment tool they should be using for their educational programs.

Key Words: Evaluation, industry programs, agribusiness, executive education

JEL Code: I21, I23, Q16

Improving Evaluation Forms

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Background
The Center for Food and Agricultural Business provides educational opportunities for mid- to upper-level leaders and managers in the food and agribusiness industry. The center offers programs open to the public and also creates customized educational offerings for individual agribusiness companies. Established in 1986, the center is the food and agribusiness industry's university partner for education and research. More than 15,000 agribusiness professionals have benefited from the center's educational efforts.

The Concern
At the conclusion of each program, the center provides its participants with an evaluation form hoping to elicit feedback on the program's quality (see Appendix 1). Program managers had been using the same forms for several years. They were lengthy and weren't providing information that the center could use to accurately assess its programs. In response to this concern, a taskforce composed of two center employees conducted research to answer the questions: What do we need to know and understand from our participants about programs? Given, what we need to know, how do we design instrument(s) to get the information we need?

Needs Assessment
To answer these questions, the duo discussed the forms and their usefulness on an individual basis with the other employees who used them. The employees (program managers, marketing manager, clericals, and instructors) were asked the following questions:

- After you complete a program/session, what is your process for thinking about ways to improve upon future sessions? (Be as specific as you can.)
- What information or feedback from participants is most helpful to you?
- When reviewing program/session evaluations, what information do you look at first?
- What kinds of information or feedback on our programs do you wish we could collect from participants that we are currently not collecting?

The taskforce also asked the staff to include any input/feedback they had on the effectiveness and/or efficiency of the evaluation forms used currently for center programs.

In an effort to learn what evaluation forms looked like for non-center programs, the researchers worked with other universities, who offer management education seminars, and with educational providers (the Center for Creative Leadership and participants of the CMED – Conference on Management and Executive Development Programs) to obtain samples of evaluation forms. A literature review written by Roucan-Kane and Suttles (2009)[1] was also extensively used.

Results of the Needs Assessment

Based on the interviews with employees and other educational providers, and on the literature review, the researchers determined that it was necessary to improve the evaluation forms. There were some recurrent concerns and needs raised by those interviews. First, the evaluations forms were too long. Furthermore, employees (particularly instructors and the marketing team) wanted more comments from the participants but acknowledged the challenge of having participants give clear and detailed feedback. The program managers wanted to continue using scaled questions. Indeed, the numbers were really useful to communicate with current and future clients.

The researchers drew the following conclusions:

- A change of format was needed[2].
- The evaluation forms could not exceed one page (front and back).
- A focus on detailed and clear participants' assessment of the program was needed.
- Both open-ended questions and close-ended questions were needed. Open-ended questions were needed to make sure the participants could give general opinions on the program. Close-ended questions (particularly the ones with scales) were needed to communicate with the clients, for marketing purposes, and to capture some opinions of participants who do not answer the open-ended questions.
- Evaluation forms cannot provide all the data needed, at least not in an effective way. Other evaluation tools were needed.

Implementation

The researchers first decided to include some rationale to explain their need for data. The following introduction paragraph was added to the evaluation form to motivate respondents: "This evaluation process is designed to provide instructors and staff with feedback about the program/learning experience. Your candid responses are important and appreciated, especially your additional written comments."

The former initial evaluation forms included general questions such as: "How would you rate this program?", "What was most beneficial to you?", "What single improvement would you suggest?" The authors decided to include a new level of analysis by asking the participants to rate the program compared to other programs they had attended with other educational providers. The purpose of this new question that asks for a relative comparison was not only to get a good rating to communicate to the clients[3] but also for clients to be able to put the ratings in context.

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[1] See "Guide for Program Evaluation" written by Maud Roucan-Kane and Joe Suttles in February 2009 at http://ageconsearch.umn.edu

[2] Survey researches demonstrate that design of the evaluation form is more important than length to motivate completion. It has to look easy to do and be consistent. http://www.extension.psu.edu/evaluation/titles.html

[3] Clients are the persons or companies that order and pay for the program. In certain cases, the clients are also participants.

To get detailed comments without making the participants write lengthy comments, more specific close-ended questions were asked. For example, participants were asked to rate the content of each section relative to four aspects: knowledge improvement, relevance to the participant's business/industry, applicability to the participant's current job, and applicability to the participant's future job. Some open-ended questions were included such as: "What did you find particularly effective or helpful?", "What needs to be improved?", "What other topics or information would you like to see added to this program?"

The same concept was used for rating the instructors. Thus, each instructor's ability to create an effective learning environment was evaluated based on the following criteria:

- This instructor was well prepared.
- This instructor linked concepts to business situations.
- This instructor effectively communicated his knowledge.

The researchers believe that instructors and facilitators do not have the same role, and program managers do not have the same expectations when they select instructors and facilitators. Instructors are expected to know the materials well, be prepared and so on. Facilitators are expected to ask pertinent questions, lead the discussions and help create an active environment for exchange of ideas. Therefore, a distinctive type of ratings was used for facilitators:

- This facilitator was well prepared.
- This facilitator actively involved the participants.
- This facilitator helped create a richer and deeper discussion.

The researchers were challenged by the use of scales. Different scales such as 4 point (1,2,3,and 4), 5 point or 7 point Likert scales can be used. The researchers opted for the 4 point Likert scale. The 4 point Likert scale obliges the participants to choose between liking and not liking the program; there is no middle point.

The end of the evaluation form thanks the participants for their input and participation in this evaluation process. Appendix 2 shows an example of an evaluation form currently being used by the Center as a result of this taskforce. Because of the diversity of the Center's programs, their audience, the different data needs, the project manager, our evaluation forms vary from one program to another and may not all implement all the changes suggested by the taskforce.

Other Evaluation Tools

The researchers found that evaluation forms cannot provide all the data needed, at least not in an effective way. Other evaluation tools were needed. As a result of the taskforce, the center implemented the following:

- A learning contract (see Appendix 3)
- Focus groups (see Appendix 4)
- Post individual interviews after the program to determine the short-term feeling about the program (see Appendix 5)

- Post-post individual interviews several months after the program to determine the long-term effect of the program's learnings (see Appendix 6)

The lack of written comments on some evaluation forms makes it sometimes difficult to use them as marketing tools. For this reason, the center incorporated the use of testimonial surveys in some programs (see Appendix 7).

Communicating the Results of Our Evaluation Forms
The researchers discovered that, while program managers had always communicated results of the evaluation forms with instructors, some descriptive statistics, found useful by the instructors, were missing. It was decided to continue providing each instructor the average of his/her session, as well as the standard deviation, the minimum and maximum. It was also decided to add to that the frequency of each response with a Likert scale (i.e., how many times a 1 was given, a 2 was given, and so on). It was also noted that having the project manager remind instructors of the open-ended comments in preparation for the next program often helped improve the instructor's performance in that program.

The researchers also determined that communication regarding a program's effectiveness was lacking at the staff level. Most employees were not aware of programs they were not involved in and the dissemination of the takeaways from the evaluation results from each program was highly limited. For these reasons, the Info-to-Action template (see Appendix 8) was implemented. It was decided that at each staff meeting the relevant programs would be presented (see Appendix 9) using the template.

Conclusion
Once the questions were developed, the researchers presented them to the rest of the team for approval. Minor changes were requested and made, and the new form was approved by the employees. The last step was for the center's design team to create a form appealing, easy to complete and short. Lots of tables were used to shorten the forms.

The taskforce team in charge of these evaluation forms also suggested the use of other evaluation tools, such as focus groups for more detailed and prepared comments. The follow-up evaluation process can also take place over the phone. Pre-tests and post-tests can also be used to determine knowledge improvement. Program testimonials ("Please use the space below to share some of your thoughts about the benefits you've gained from participating in the program…") are also really useful for marketing purposes.

A big component of the success of an evaluation is time. Participants must be given enough time to complete an evaluation form. The center tends to give the form to participants at the beginning of the program and remind the participants about it at the end of each day of the program. To increase the response rate, the participants are asked to leave their completed evaluation form when the program is finished, instead of being asked to send their evaluation or complete it online.

More work is still required to make the evaluation forms more useful and to continue to innovate to better satisfy clients that are becoming more interested in knowing the effects of their invested dollars in programs. We are currently working on new evaluation forms that will measure the return on investment.

Appendix 1: Initial Program Evaluation Form

PURDUE
UNIVERSITY

Program XXX

Developed by The Center For Food and Agricultural Business

Date

SEMINAR EVALUATION

Name (Optional): ______________________
(Please print)

PART I – Lecture/Discussions

Rate each of the following sessions for "Relevance of Content":

Name of Session #1 **Additional Comments:**

Name of session's instructor (s)

Not Relevant				Extremely Relevant
1	2	3	4	5

Name of Session #2 **Additional Comments:**

Name of session's instructor (s)

Not Relevant				Extremely Relevant
1	2	3	4	5

PART II – Instructor Evaluations

Overall, how effectively did the following instructors deliver the course content?

Name of Instructor #1

Not Effective				Highly Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Additional Comments:

Name of Instructor #2

Not Effective				Highly Effective
1	2	3	4	5

Additional Comments:

PART III - Logistics

Overall, how satisfied were you with the "details" (facilities, meals, service, etc.) *Please circle one.*

Not Satisfied				Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

Make any additional comments you would like:

PART IV – Overall Program

Overall, how satisfied are you with your experience in this program? *Please circle one:*

Not Satisfied				Very Satisfied
1	2	3	4	5

What single thing was **most beneficial** to you and why?

What single **improvement** would you suggest?

Please share with us 2-3 business ideas/improvements that you developed this week, which you plan to put in place upon your return home. (These will be kept confidential.)

What other topics would you suggest as productive and valuable for a workshop such as the one you have just experienced?

Appendix 2: An Example of the Evaluation Forms Currently Being Used by CAB

Program XXX
Date
EVALUATION FORM

Overall Module: *On a scale of 1 to 5, (5 being excellent), how would you rate the overall module?*

Module Sessions: On *a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being excellent), how do you rate each session on the following criteria?*

	Session "___" Instructor X	**Session "___" Instructor Y**	**Session "___" Instructor Z**
The Session Increased my Knowledge in this Area	______________	______________	______________
The Session was Relevant to My Position	______________	______________	______________
The Instructor/Facilitator Delivered Effectively	______________	______________	______________

Additional Comments
____
____
____
____
____
____
____

What single thing was **most beneficial** to you and why?
____
____
____
____
____
____

What single **improvement** would you suggest and why?

____

____

____

Logistics**:** ***On a scale of 1 to 5 (5 being excellent), please rate the following:***

Classroom Facility ______
Hotel Accommodations ______
Meals and Refreshments ______
Program Materials ______
Additional Comments:

____

____

____

~Thank you!

Appendix 3: Learning Contract

Program XXX

Center for Food and Agricultural Business ◆ Purdue University ◆ West Lafayette, Indiana

COMMITMENT TO LEARNING & APPLICATION

Instructions

As a result of this seminar, what learnings or competencies have you built? And how will you apply these to your organization to make an impact?

Please respond to the question on "take aways" below. Then describe the actions you will take; the impact they will have; and the evidence available to show the learnings have been applied and value created for the organization.

Participant Name: ____

Description of Learning Outcome #1 – What is one key "take away" I have extracted from this seminar?

a. Action Learning Strategies and Resources – This is how I will go about applying this learning to my job, function, or organization. (Activities I will lead; colleagues I will consult; resources I will utilize)

____

____

b. Documentation of Impact – This is how I will know and demonstrate my actions have impact on my organization and how I will document the value of that impact.

____

____

c. Evidence of Accomplishment – This is how I will know or prove that I have applied my learning and they have created value for the organization.

Description of Learning Outcome #2 – What is one key "take away" I have extracted from this seminar?

a. Action Learning Strategies and Resources – This is how I will go about applying this learning to my job, function, or organization. (activities I will lead; colleagues I will consult; resources I will utilize)

b. Documentation of Impact – This is how I will know and demonstrate my actions have impact on my organization and how I will document the value of that impact.

c. Evidence of Accomplishment – This is how I will know or prove that I have applied my learning and they have created value for the organization.

Appendix 4: Example of Focus Group Interview Questions

1. One at a time tell us your name and something about what you learned from the program?
2. What are the most serious challenges facing your team at the current time?
3. Talk about how the program addressed these challenges?
4. Were you satisfied with what you learned in the program? Why or why not?
5. Do you believe that this program will enable your team to meet its challenges more effectively? If so, how? If not, what was missing?
6. What goal(s) did you set as a result of the program?
7. What have you/your team accomplished relative to your (its) goal(s)?
8. How will this new learning have an impact on you/your team?
9. What suggestions for improvement do you have for the designers of the program and the instructors?

Appendix 5: Script of an Example of an Individual Interview

Program Name:
Interviewer Name:
Interviewee Name:
Interview Date:

We like to check in with people about thirty days after a program to see how they have used the program and what did they think about it. Is this a good time to talk? From time to time we do an extended interview to learn more about the long-term impact of the program. Your responses are confidential. The interview will take about thirty minutes. I'd like to start by having you tell me a little bit about your experience in the program.

1. Why did you attend the program?
2. What were you looking for?
3. Did you get what you were looking for?
4. What stands out for you at this point with respect to lessons or insights you may have had?
5. Do any of the activities/classes you had during the program stand out for you as you think back on them? Why?
6. Have you used some of the tools learned during the program?
7. What was the program's most valuable activity to you?
8. Have you changed your behavior as a result of the initiative?
9. Can you give examples of those changes?
10. What do you do know that you didn't or couldn't do before the program?
11. Is your team/organization changing because of any influences from the program?
12. Are you more effective or less effective because of something you learned in the program? Provide some specific examples.
13. Do you find support for, or resistance to, change? Provide some examples.
14. Do you have any sense of what kinds of follow-up programs might be useful for you over the next year or two?
15. Do you have any other thoughts about the initiative and its meaning to you?
16. Have you recommended this program to anyone else? If so, why did you recommend the program to them?

Appendix 6: Examples of Questions for the Post-Post Evaluation

1. Have you implemented the changes you had planned to as a result of the program?

2. What was missing in the program and would have helped you?

3. What type of programs would you like to attend with CAB in the future?

Appendix 7: Testimonial Surveys
Program XXX

We are preparing the materials for the 2006 XXX program and would appreciate the opportunity to include a comment from you regarding your experience this week in the program. Please use the space below to share some of your thoughts about the benefits you've gained from participating in the program. You might write how you would state the benefits of the program to a colleague who is interested? Or you could share what section of the program has been a highlight for you this week. Or perhaps you might list a key take-away that you'll put into action when you arrive back at your office. Thank you for your input and for helping us reach the next class of participants!

Appendix 8: Info-to-Action Template

Info-To-Action

Center for Food and Agricultural Business
MS-MBA in Food and Agribusiness Management
Purdue University

Name of Event/Program/Group/Project:

• Describe the event/program in a couple of sentences

<u>Positive Experience</u>

• Your idea or success that could be leveraged into other efforts by our staff

---

<u>Could Do Better</u>

• One thing you saw or tried that was not as effective as you'd hoped, and any suggestion to do it better.

<u>Need to Know</u>

• An item or issue where you need more information or advice from other staff

Shared Reflection Spurs Action

Appendix 9: Info-to-Action Illustration

Info-To-Action

Center for Food and Agricultural Business
MS-MBA in Food and Agribusiness Management
Purdue University

Name of Event/Program/Group/Project:

• Name the program

Program XXX

Positive Experience

• Your idea or success that could be leveraged into other efforts by our staff

Email communication to participants: Every time an important update happened on the website (logistics details, posting of materials, intermodule assignments, etc), an email went out to all the participants directing them to the change. Each of these emails always included their user id and passwords, eliminating any chance that they forgot their login information. This was a helpful service to the participants as indicated by their responses to me.

In the module, we sat participants in groups every day. This increased interaction and facilitated understanding of difficult material between group members.

Could Do Better

• One thing you saw or tried that was not as effective as you'd hoped, and any suggestion to do it better.

We did not want the participants to peruse all of the material prior to the session so we gave them the material they needed at the beginning of each session. The combination of a lot of material and a tight schedule, created a sense of chaos rather than surprise.

Need to Know

• An item or issue where you need more information or advice from other staff

I need to find an inexpensive place for a scavenger hunt/group building exercise. Any ideas, suggestions?

Shared Reflection Spurs Action