Educational Support Cell (ESC)/TLDE
Tips & Strategies
Assessment Series, Part IV
Assessing Instructor Performance

With the first three parts of our series on Assessment (April-June), we have examined theory and purpose as well as have done a deep dive on two combinations of assessment types—Informal/Formative, and Formal/Summative. If you missed any of these editions, you can find them at http://www.soc.mil/swcs/esc.html.

This month, we are going to stray from discussing how we assess our learners and look at why we should be assessing instructor performance and what we might look at in doing so.

Now, before you run scared, we are talking about ASSESSMENT and not EVALUATION. Going back to our first installment of this series, assessment is more about finding strengths and weaknesses while evaluation is about "the grade". Everyone should be assessed at every position, and we should welcome assessment as an opportunity to showcase what we do well and to get assistance in improving, not as a negative to be dreaded.

The Why
Ask my dad the question, "Why?" and we always got the same response.
    "Because I said so."
My guess is that response wouldn't be good enough for our population, so let's look at why we should assess instructor performance. Simply put, if you look at the research on learning, the #1 determinant of whether or not a student learned was not the amount of funding the school had, the degree levels of the adults in the environment, or even the amount of technology exposure. The learning that went on in the classroom was directly tied to the teacher.   Variables that the instructor controls include, but are not limited to:

> *The instructor is the #1 variable in an educational environment.*

The Emotional Environment---no wait a moment there Roukema, you can't use the e-word with ARSOF Soldiers---can, and just did. ☺ The emotional environment includes many intangibles---the energy in the room, the instructor's attitude (positive or negative; motivating or dampening), the control exercised by the instructor or turned over to the ADULT learners----and it is extremely important.

Organization of the Environment
There is a balance to running an effective learning environment. There has to be a balance of structure and freedom. Learners appreciate being active participants in their own learning experiences, and a good instructor will balance the "Pushing" or feeding of information with the "Pulling" or use of the learners' own experiences and knowledge to balance the learning. Additionally, the use of time is purposeful and deliberate, and schedules are followed only until they deliberately aren't.

Rapport
Instructors that are effective teachers build connections with their learners. They learn about their individual backgrounds, and use their strengths to assist with improving their weaknesses. A good instructor

understands how to use each learner's unique background and abilities to benefit the class as a whole, and this can only be accomplished by first getting to know who those learners are. This is the first step to using these connections to then build mentoring relationships. Afterall, you may one day be sharing a foxhole with that person in the front row.

The How

There are tons of instruments that are used to assess an instructor. The key is to 1) know what you are looking at, and 2) ensure the instrument is reliable---that is, ensure the instrument is looking at the behaviors that have been deemed important to the learning environment. Whether an instructor is wearing the correct cap or that the Learning Objectives slide was read may be important in some instances, but I'd argue that there are more important indicators to look for in a classroom or field environment.

- Facilitation of Learning—is the instructor asking thought-provoking questions and providing guidance to the discussion rather than lecturing?
- Classroom Environment—is there a positive, interactive dynamic? Does the instructor draw upon the learners' experiences? Is he/she aware of the learners' reception of the information/skills?
- Presentation---are there smooth transitions from activity to activity? Does the instructor exhibit poise and confidence?
- Principles of ALM—Does the instructor make connections between learning activities and the ARSOF attributes? Does the instructor teach towards an outcome---a bigger "so what" than just a set of facts or skills?
- Assessment & Feedback---Does the instructor use multiple indicators, both summative and formative, to monitor progress. Does he/she make effective use of the "halt" to give a tactical pause to allow for learner reflection and feedback?

Finally, be sure there is an End-of-Course Critique (EOCC). Use the EOCC as one of the data points in instructor assessment. The students spend much more time with an instructor than leadership and will accurately report from their perspective----again, ensure you are asking the right questions and look for trends in the data (tune in next month to read more about this).

The Challenge

The truth is, when time becomes a factor and a leader is looking to find ways to prioritize time, the easiest thing to cut is instructor performance assessment/evaluation. However, it is not only the easiest thing to cut, but it is the most important factor in successful learning. Taking the time to do it right is what the high quality instructional leader does. You need the right assessment instrument (one that fits your situation), the right people doing the observing/assessing (with consistency among them and adherence to high standards of performance), and the commitment to spend the time and effort required to do it right.

The Educational Support Cell (ESC) has the task here at the SOCoE to assist you with just this charge. We can provide you with a tool for instructor assessment, tailored to your outcomes, will assist leadership or peer instructors in how to observe and give feedback, design an EOCC for you and build it in an electronic platform for ease of use, and support you in identifying and standardizing processes to implement for assessment and development. *A one-stop shop…check us out!*

Join us again next month for the final installment of our series on Assessment as we look at how to use the PIC and five (5) data points to assess program performance.

Assessment Series

April: Part I: What it is, and what it's not.
May: Part II: Assessing Student Performance
June: Part III: Assessing Student Performance (Formal/Summative)
July: Part IV: Assessing Instructor Performance
August: Part V: Assessing Program Performance