

THE PRESENCE OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER CAN ADD ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OVER AND ABOVE THE COGNITIVE LEARNING ASSOCIATED WITH MOST TRAINING PROGRAMS.

YOUR CEO AND NATURAL TEAM TRAINING

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BOSS

Numerous authors have suggested that the chief executive officer exercises a major influence on organizational change efforts in both the public and private sectors.¹ Some research findings support the notion not only that the CEO plays a central role, but that the change effort is doomed to failure without that person's total support and approval.²

This article illustrates the impact of having the CEO present during a management training program involving the boss and his/her *immediate* subordinates. For future reference we will call this a natural team. The results indicate that multiple benefits can be derived if the CEO is present during the training sessions.

Two natural teams participated in a five-day management training program designed to provide cognitive and experiential learning in organization theory and administrative behavior. All participants met together with the same consultant for the entire five days.

Activities included lectures, discussions of the reading material which had been completed prior to the training session, and exercises designed to illustrate the various topics being discussed. For learning purposes, participants were treated as a single group, rather than as two separate groups from different organizations.

The participants included the top-management staff from two separate organizations, and the groups were similar in a number of ways. For example, the groups were the same size ($n=8$) and had the same male-female distribution. Furthermore, the group members did the same kind of work (human services delivery), lived and worked in the same geographical and political environment (a medium sized city in the midwest), were approximately the same age and had similar professional experience and educational backgrounds. In addition, all members of both groups participated in every session of the five-day training program.

The only significant difference between the two groups was the

presence of the CEO. In Team One the CEO participated in the entire training program, while the CEO of Team Two was absent, because of a family vacation which had been planned for over a year.

Data from Teams One and Two were collected during the first and last hours of the training session. Data were also collected from a comparison group comprised of the chief executive officer and top staff of a public agency engaged in activities similar to those performed by members of Teams One and Two. Data were collected from the comparison group on Monday morning and during the last hour of the work day on Friday.

The instruments included Likert's "Profile of Organization and Performance Characteristics" (Likert Profile)³ and Friedlander's "Group Behavior Inventory" (GBI).⁴ The Likert Profile is composed of 18 items designed to measure organization climate. Each item is represented by a 20-point scale and describes four separate systems of organization. All respondents are asked to mark the position on the continuum which

groups in which members mutually influence one another and the leader and assume responsibility for setting goals.

4. *Personal Involvement and Participation* is descriptive of groups in which members want, expect, and achieve active participation in group meetings. The combination of high expectations and actual participation implies a fulfillment that is reflected in the desire to continue group meetings.

5. *Intergroup Trust* (versus Intragroup Competitiveness) depicts a group in which the members have confidence in one another. Groups low on this dimension can be characterized more as a collection of individuals who are reluctant to alter their individual personal opinions and ideas for the sake of working consensus. Competition among members then tends to be destructive and submerged.

6. *Worth of Meetings* is a generalized measure of the feelings about the meetings of one's group

— as either good, valuable, strong, and pleasant, or as bad, worthless, weak, and unpleasant.⁶

Participant responses on the GBI yielded similar results to those reported in Figure 1 for the Likert Profile. Team One showed a statistically significant improvement on three of the six variables, while Team Two and the comparison group evidenced no significant change between measures.

The CEO's Input

The results clearly indicate that additional benefits, beyond the cognitive and attitudinal changes, can result from the presence of the CEO or supervisor in a training program. In each case the scores on the Likert Profile and the GBI evidence a significant improvement in the organization climate and group effectiveness for Team One, while both the comparison group and Team Two reported no change during the same period.

Additional data were collected via interviews from members of Team One and Two toward the close of the training session. Without exception, the seven members of Team Two indicated that they believed the training program would have been much more beneficial had their CEO been present. In addition, all expressed serious reservations about their ability as a group and as individuals to apply what they had learned to their work in the home environment. Their primary reason for such reservations centered on their uncertainty about what the CEO would think and the degree to which he would support their efforts to apply what they had learned during the training session.

On the other hand, members of Team One evidenced a high degree of optimism regarding the general worth of the training session and the potential for a positive transfer of the learning to the home environment; and in each case, the reason for the optimism was directly linked to the CEO. As one participant put it, "This has been the best training program I have ever attended. As I think about it, much of the content was not new. In fact, I had been exposed to most

of it in management classes when I was in college. The real benefit came from our discussion of the material with [the CEO]. I watched him closely, and, as a result, I knew instantly what he thought of the material — whether he was receptive or not — and then we could talk about how they applied to problems we have back home. I got some insight into [the CEO] which I had never had before."

These data and other research studies⁷ suggest that multiple benefits can be derived from the presence of the CEO and the other natural team members in training programs. For example, the potential for transfer of learning increased for Team One as compared to Team Two, since all members of the group had the same theoretical frame of reference and experienced the same training design. Since they learned the same language, so to speak, they perceived great potential for applying the cognitive material to problems in their home environment.

In addition, the presence of the CEO provided an opportunity for informal team building to take place. All of the participants reported that during the training session they got to know each other better on an informal basis. In some cases the participants maintained that they were able to use the training material as a vehicle for working through some of their interpersonal and organizational problems with their CEO during informal discussions outside the context of the training session. Of particular benefit was the resolution of issues between the CEO and the respective subordinates, since research supports the notion that it is difficult, if not impossible, for subordinates to resolve problems effectively at the peer level until they are adequately resolved at the superior-subordinate level.⁸

However, a number of factors suggest that the degree to which these results can be generalized to other organizations is limited. First, the sample size is limited to two natural teams and, therefore, the results may be peculiar to these groups. If two different

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teams had participated in the study, different results may have taken place. Although the scores for the comparison group are consistent with those for Team Two, whose leader was absent, the results still may be peculiar to these groups. Had data been collected from a larger sample for each category (groups tested with and without the leader present), more firm conclusions could have been drawn from the results.

Second, the results may have been caused by the consultant who facilitated the training session. Since the consultant's behavior has a powerful influence on the group, it is uncertain how much the consultant's abilities, personality and skill affected the outcome for the group.⁹ However, since the two groups were exposed to the same consultant during the entire five-day period, one would expect that the consultant's impact on the two groups would have been similar, and, therefore, that it would have had minimal influence on the differential results shown in Figures 1 and 2. Nevertheless, one cannot rule out the possibility that if another consultant had been used, the results might have been different.

Third, the make-up of the two groups may have had an influence on the results reported in Figures 1 and 2. Even though the profile of the 15 participants showed homogeneity on a number of demographic factors, there may have been differences which are not accounted for here that determined the results shown in Figures 1 and 2.

Fourth, the training session design may have contributed significantly to the results. If another design had been used — or if different content material had been studied — the results might have been different.

Fifth, the results may be peculiar to the CEO of Team One. If the CEO of Team Two had been present, there is no guarantee that the same results would have been produced. Thus, the personal characteristics of the CEO may have been solely responsible for the positive results shown in the

Figures.

Sixth, the two groups may have responded differently to the content material of the training program. For example, if Team One members actually learned different concepts from Team Two during the training session, the cognitive input could have had an impact upon their perceptions and, as a result, could have influenced their responses on the post-training instruments. However, the before and after data which were collected to measure cognitive data which were collected to measure cognitive understanding showed no significant differences between the before and after scores for Team One and those for Team Two from the same administrations. The average scores for both teams were approximately the same on both the before and after measures. Thus, if the members of Teams One and Two actually learned different concepts during the training session, the instruments designed to measure cognitive understanding were not able to account for this difference in the two groups' conceptual development.

Finally, the improvement may have been caused by a change in the way Team One perceived the instruments at the end of the week, and this change in perceptions may have been responsible for the change in scores. If the meaning of the scales is different at the end of the week, the participant will respond in ways that contravene the assumptions of the statistical analysis. However, all 15 people participated in the pre- and post-administrations of the instruments and received the same cognitive input during the training session. Yet only Team One improved; and the scores for Team Two were almost identical to those reported for the comparison group in terms of the amount of change evidenced between measures. If a change in perceptions was responsible for the improved scores, one would expect the scores for Team Two to have improved as well. Nonetheless, Team One may have been peculiar in comparison to the other team, and the change in

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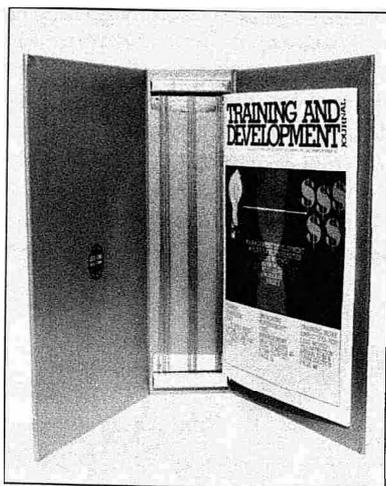
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scores may have been caused by a change in its perceptions of the instruments.

Can CEOs Help?

These data do have implications for how both managers and consultants perceive the interface between training and consultation. If the goal of the training intervention is cognitive improvement only, then that goal may be achieved in a stranger group, a cousin group, or a family group without the presence of the leader. If improved organizational climate and team effectiveness are additional goals of the intervention, then the above data suggest that the intervention may be much more effective if the entire team attended, including the leader. Further, these data support the notion that group training has minimal impact on the degree to which the team works effectively together if the leader is not present.

Certainly more research must be done before it can be categorically stated that these findings are solely due to the leader's presence in the group. However, the data do suggest that the presence of the chief executive officer can provide additional benefits over and above the cognitive learning associated with most management training programs.

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