

"A LOT OF TRAINING ORGANIZATIONS WILL HAVE TO GO BACK TO THE DRAWING BOARD AND RETHINK THEIR APPROACH IF THEY WANT TO MAKE THEIR MARK IN MOST ASIAN COUNTRIES, WHERE AT BEST ENGLISH IS DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND."

MANAGEMENT TRAINING THROUGH CHINESE EYES

BY NEVILLE R. WALKER

When President Carter made his New Year's resolution to normalize relations with China, he opened up a *Pandora's Box* full of opportunities for the British Crown Colony of Hong Kong. It was paradoxical, yet predictable, that one of the main beneficiaries of the American decision should be the last, but not least, outpost of a faded Empire.

For just on 30 years Hong Kong has been a thrusting, thriving community that has packed an industrial revolution into a generation and emerged as one of the great trading posts of the world. It has achieved all this through a combination of the canniness of the local Chinese business community, and the techniques and contacts of Western entrepreneurs, allied to an industrious and adaptable workforce which enjoys the highest wages in Asia outside Japan — but without the crippling effects of intolerable inflation.

What has all this to do with management training? In the next few years, it will mean plenty for more

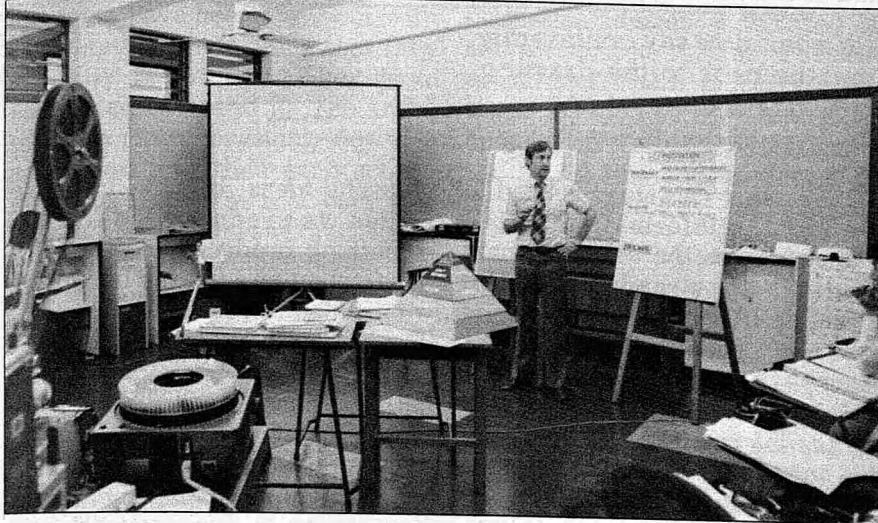
and more American corporations and companies, as the world's most populous nation opens its doors and strives to achieve its aim of modernizing itself by the turn of the century. Already Hong Kong is gearing itself for the American invasion. Office space is being reserved, apartments spruced up, hotel rooms built, and school places reserved for the expected vanguard of Americans who will carry the Stars and Stripes to the *Middle Kingdom*.

Newcomers will have a lot to learn (and a lot of them will learn the hard way) about Hong Kong, its role as China's window to the world, how it works, and what makes the Chinese on both sides of the border tick. Managerial skills in Hong Kong are already at a premium and the scarce resources are quickly snapped up. Building a cohesive, loyal and effective team led by "kweilo" (foreign devil) expatriates can be a long and difficult task, though it has been achieved with remarkable success by many of the big organizations operating in Hong Kong.

The Royal Hong Kong Jockey

Club, a pillar of the establishment and one of the most powerful influences in the colony, is a case in point. The Club is to Hong Kong what the New York Yacht Club is to America . . . anyone who is anybody is in it, and those who would like to be a somebody are bursting to get in. The Club employs a staff of 3,000 full-time and 8,000 part-time employees headed by a dynamic, no-nonsense, retired British Army General to keep its machines well-oiled and running smoothly. When you consider that the Club turns over more than \$15 million on the totalizer at any of its 69 race meetings over the year, you'll understand the need for constant care and attention.

The Club, like any of the big organizations in Hong Kong, has experienced problems with the training of management personnel, especially in the recent *boom* years. It had tried and discarded programs devised by two large consultant firms when we were given the somewhat daunting distinction of being *third time* lucky. Fortunately Lady Luck has been kind to us, and we have developed



a program that not only satisfies the Club management, but has the staff thinking and acting along clear and constructive lines.

We made the breakthrough in the simplest possible way: by using simplicity itself. The challenge was to design a *supervisory management* program for participants who know English only as a second language, and whose knowledge of it is as rudimentary as their grasp of management and its techniques. In short we went back to the drawing board and came up with the "Chop Suey" method. Today the program is well and truly launched, and although it is now largely conducted in Cantonese (the tongue-twisting dialect of 99 per cent of Hong Kong's population) most of the management terms and expressions are still retained in English.

This is not as curious as it sounds, for more than 100 years of Western influence have diluted the Hong Kong version of Cantonese to a very colloquial level, with many key English words being thrown into Chinese conversation. The explanation is that it is quite difficult, sometimes impossible, to convey English meanings in Cantonese. Even the word *supervisor* presents difficulty in the translation. There is disagreement over which Chinese expression, *team leader* or *officer in charge*, is correct. Mindful of these difficulties and with a thorough understanding of the trainees' background, we drew up a basic introduction to *Supervisory Management* consisting of three interlocking modules.

- Principles of Supervision
- Motivation
- Communication

Each module runs for two consecutive days with a one-day review session scheduled a month later. The trainees are expected to complete the three modules within six months of starting the program.

When we drew up our game plan, our aim was to keep the content at a level where it could be readily understood by the Club's Chinese instructors and the trainees. To do this we had constantly to ask ourselves two fundamental questions: "*What are we trying to say in everyday English?*" and "*Is there any reason why we don't say it this way?*" Simple questions, but some interesting answers. It was a salutary lesson, because we feel that too many trainers have gone off to ivory towers, talking in a language that sounds unintelligible to those whose first language is English. More the pity those whose mother tongue is not English.

Our first step, therefore, was to draw up some rules and stick to them. We came up with five basic rules.

1. *Simplicity*: The content of the program should only cover the main principles with the minimum amount of theory.

2. *Practical*: The content should be relevant to the trainee's job, with examples illustrating teaching points related to typical on-job situations.

3. *Immediate*: The ideas and techniques suggested should be in

such a form that trainees could put them to immediate use on the job.

4. *Impact*: The method of instruction should be predominantly visual, using wherever necessary an association of words and pictures to create easier understanding. (The Chinese have a saying that *one picture is worth a thousand words*.)

5. *Feedback*: Trainees should be tested frequently throughout the program for their understanding, and immediate feedback given to them on their progress.

We can now say confidently that the back-to-the-drawing board concept has paid dividends. Apart from a few faltering steps along the way, we were able to fit the Chinese puzzle together. This article describes our fundamental approach.

Structure

The structure of each module follows a consistent pattern and comprises the following activities. For the sake of simplicity breaks are not shown.

Activity:	Approx. % of time:
Instruction by program leader	35
Individual & team work	30
Group critique & discussion	25
Training films & filmstrips	10

Most of the instruction is scheduled in short 20 to 30-minute sessions during the morning. We were careful to minimize instruction after lunch when trainees as a rule are less attentive. (The Chinese have an excellent cuisine, and the idea of a light snack lunch is unthinkable.) The afternoon, as a result, is occupied mainly by the other activities. On the evening of day one there is a reading assignment in preparation for day two. Preparation for the module itself is contained in the pre-session materials.

Surveys

To add reality to the classroom instruction, we conducted several random surveys in Chinese among the trainees' subordinates prior to the program. The results of these surveys are then introduced during the three modules. For example, in the module "*Principles of Supervision*," 14 common examples of poor supervision are pre-

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sented, and the trainees are asked to list them in an order showing the worst fault first and so on. The group result is then contrasted with the result from the survey and the differences discussed. The lesson being that it is not your faults as you see them that matter, but your faults as seen through the eyes of others.

Language

This was the most hazardous course we had to plot. To avoid the pitfall of careless and interchangeable expression, we had to train ourselves to think of English as if it were our second language. For example, when we spoke of the *objectives* agreed between the supervisor and the manager, we had to avoid subsequent reference to these *objectives* as *goals* or *targets*. While this certainly limits the scope for variety of expression, it is of great benefit to the trainee who is not left pondering the difference between *objectives*, *goals* and *targets*. Another useful by-product of this technique is that it saves embarrassing the Chinese whose English is not so good; who, either through fear of losing *face* or natural politeness, will generally pretend to understand something that he doesn't.

Method of Instruction

The method of instruction used throughout the program is based on the training technique developed by the British Association for Commercial and Industrial Education (BACIE). The BACIE method is "suitable for imparting (the new) knowledge which, after subsequent discussion and practice, will become the basis for some form of competence or skill in the work situation."¹ The procedure is broken down into five main stages:

1. *Prime*: The purpose of the *prime* stage is to prepare the trainees for learning by introducing the subject, by convincing them of the need to listen, and by displaying the title and main headings of your instruction.

2. *Present*: This stage is used to *present* the information to the trainees. Since the title and main headings are already displayed (The BACIE method recommends the use of a hook-and-loop board) it is simply a matter of dealing with each heading in turn and developing the information under related key points.

3. *Summarize*: The purpose of the *summarize* stage is to weld the details of the instruction together with a concise summary. As the structure of title, main headings, and key points is already on display, this can be done by running through each point in turn.

4. *Consolidate*: By the end of stage 3, you will have given, in effect, a short lecture. The idea of the *consolidate* stage is to coax the trainees to recall the presented information. This is achieved by a series of questions with the answer, if correct, being echoed. That is to say, the answerer's own words should be used as far as possible as a form of psychological reward. A second step in this stage is to clarify any difficulties that the trainees may have in their understanding.

5. *Check*: The last stage is *check*. Its purpose is to measure the effectiveness of your instruction. It is completed by way of a test given to the trainees with immediate feedback on their results after the test.

Although the BACIE method of instruction relies on the use of a hook-and-loop board, we added an overhead projector to supplement the instruction in the *present* stage.

Training Aids

The design of our overhead transparencies was an important feature, and it was due not so much to our own expertise but to that of an outsider. We started in the test programs with our *home-styled* transparencies, backed by a flip chart placed alongside the screen on which the instructor could note spontaneous comments

or useful ideas. But the transparencies we produced looked like something produced in a training department on a limited budget, so we decided to recruit the services of a graphic designer. As it turned out, it helped that she knew nothing about *supervisory management*, for this gave her an advantage over someone already conditioned in management gobbledegook.

Compared to her work, our efforts now look amateurish . . . wordy, poorly arranged and cluttered with key words lost in a fuzz of detail. As trainers we knew the message we wanted to get over, and our graphic designer came up with the most effective way of doing it (and taught us a few lessons in the process).

By simplifying each message we were able to unclutter the transparencies, and communicate with a much livelier and more meaningful use of the language. Key words are now highlighted by graphic means rather than the more common technique of underlining. Our recommendation to trainers? Stick to what you are good at, and use professional help for everything else.

We followed much the same approach with our handouts, keeping them brief, informative and easy to read. Many of us will agree that handouts have become a series of boring-looking notes, time-consuming to produce, which trainees typically file away as quickly as possible, never to be reopened. The more alert training departments now issue attractive files to hold the notes, hoping this will encourage the trainees to keep the notes somewhere in view.

We overcame the problem by limiting the handouts to 50 per cent reductions of the transparencies. This can be done inexpensively on a photocopier with the facility for reducing copies of the original. The trainees now go away with a set of interesting, concisely prepared handouts covering the key points of each module. The

handouts have been a sell-out with the beauty of them being that they are easy to prepare. They have eliminated the need for the trainees to write everything down, a carry-over from their early schooling. This last point is a very real plus, because Chinese traditionally are taught by memory alone, and old habits die hard.

To reinforce program content and to provide a change of pace in the instruction, we integrated selected filmstrips from the series produced by Resources for Education and Management Inc.² The way we use them is designed to help the trainees adjust from the spoken voice of the instructor to the recorded voice of the commentator. The filmstrip is shown four times during the module, but only twice as a sight and sound production. During the first showing the trainees follow the commentary with a copy of the script, the purpose being to discover the words and expressions that cause difficulty. A Variable Speech Controller³ is available for classes preferring a slower listening speed. After the instructor has dealt with any questions, the filmstrip is shown in its normal form.

Later in the day or the next day the filmstrip is shown again, followed immediately by a final showing of the pictures only. This last technique is suggested by Resources saying "there is much evidence to show that just simply seeing the pictures over again immediately after the first showing, without using the sound, increases the retention by considerable amounts . . . perhaps up to one-third more."

The use of a 16mm color film adds further variety to each module, and again serves to reinforce the learning. We have tried as far as possible to follow the language of the film and filmstrip in our overhead transparencies, so as to minimize conflicting words and expressions. The approach for showing the film is similar to that for the filmstrip, except we have eliminated the final showing of the pictures without sound. In its place we have substituted a modified version which takes the form of a

discussion session stimulated by *still* scenes from the film. The *stills* are in fact 35mm slides. We find that it is easier to work with slides on a daylight screen than stopping the actual film and switching the lights on and off for discussion.

Measuring Learning

The testing procedures in our modules are straightforward, involving the usual pretest and posttest to measure the trainees' learning. We use the *agree/disagree* format, but we have refined this with a third *don't know* column, hoping for honesty rather than an ill-informed guess. Analyzing the *don't know* column has given us a much better avenue of pinpointing the areas of weakness. At the conclusion of each module there is a criterion test which tells us the success of our instruction.

While some of the ideas and techniques used in our program seem like kid's stuff in the sophisticated, *real* world of management training, they have worked for us, and in the process raised some serious questions as to the direction of training. Certainly in the developing countries, the traditional, high-powered slick approach overlooks the basic need to teach common sense in language that is simple to understand. A lot of training organizations will have to go back to the drawing board and rethink their approach if they want to make their mark in most Asian countries, where at best English is difficult to understand.

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Neville R. Walker is the managing director of Management Forum Limited, Hong Kong, a professional practice specializing in management training and development.



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