

# Television In Management Development

## Pros and Cons of A Rapidly-Growing Training Method

Malcolm Shaw

**I**t is not very realistic to discuss management education by television in particular without discussing management education in general. In tracing the development of industrial training and management education over the last twenty years, one finds a wide diversity of concepts, ideas and techniques which have each had an impact on the way we now approach the problem of developing people in industry.

Most of us could agree on at least three or four basic ideas or frames of references which have had profound

effect on the whole area of management education.

### **Behaviorial Science**

The first emerges from the work of the University of Michigan, the National Training Laboratories, and from the efforts of social psychologists and behavioral scientists in general. They have made several telling points:

1. One is that in many areas, giving people information, providing them with principles, and intellectual inputs does not produce behavior change or improved effectiveness.

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Of course, this does not deny that information giving is often appropriate and useful. The key issue here is that when resistance is high, when habit patterns are well-formed, when there is a high degree of complexity in the material to be covered, straight-forward information giving is rarely adequate.

2. Secondly, the behavioral scientist has clearly made the point that a great deal of learning, if it is to affect behavior, must involve the feelings and the emotions—must involve the total person. Reading a book about how to manage may be of some assistance to a manager, but his operational behavior is most profoundly affected by experience itself. Therefore, the behavioral scientist has constantly plugged for involvement, participation, experiential learning.

We, in industry, have been in many ways quick to respond to his plea. Thousands of people annually participate in sensitivity training or T-Groups. I understand that, over 50,000 managers have participated in "The Managerial Grid" and there's probably no way of calculating accurately the number of sessions conducted in industry where the leader or trainer is guided by some of the underlying principles of participatory learning and emotional involvement as a tool for behavior change.

### McGregor

A second major trend, and I suspect often overlooked, was best brought to the surface by the late Douglas McGregor. It is increasingly difficult to find an organization, or even to find a manager, who is not in some fashion familiar with theory Y and with some of the principles underlying it.

It seems to me that McGregor had

two basic messages. First, the idea of telling people what's wrong with them in a performance review is not the best way to help them improve. He began to place emphasis on results-oriented and work-oriented performance review and management development.

His second key and closely related point revolved around the idea that satisfaction and self-fulfillment in the industrial context must come through work. People need to be challenged. They need the opportunity to have influence on their own surroundings, to have something to say about the goals and tasks in which they are involved.

### Low Risk Training

In the development and pursuit of these several basic ingredients, those of us who have been concerned with management development and training have often found ourselves pursuing unproductive paths. We have on occasion been enticed by the quick and easy solution, the dramatic approach, or the low-risk training effort.

There is no question about it—it is generally a lot safer and more comfortable to bring in an inspirational, entertaining speaker to talk to our management groups than it is to set up a training design which makes it possible for managers to confront some of the basic and uncomfortable issues which stand in the way of progress. It's a lot more enjoyable in many ways to provide salesmen with a series of exciting "dog-and-pony" shows than it is to come to grips with the development of some of the basic knowledge and skills that are needed if one is to cope with complex sales situations and resistant buyers.

The point, however, I think, is that in our training efforts, we have begun to move in the directions that were pin-pointed by McGregor and his associates and predecessors at M.I.T.,

Harvard, Michigan, and The National Training Laboratories. There is certainly some evidence that from time to time we have confused friendliness, kindness, and "soft" management approaches with sound human relations and management development. We have at times substituted persuasion and manipulation for understanding and commitment: but nevertheless, progress built upon some of the basic concepts of behavioral science and systematic management has become increasingly notable.

Rarely does one find a contemporary training director or specialist in this field who is terribly concerned with entertaining, titillating, or amusing his students. Rarely does one find a professional trainer or management development person who does not recognize that learning isn't always comfortable or easy, but that it may be stressful—and that change comes about only after a great deal of effort and emotional investment.

### **Positive Involvement**

Gradually, management educators and industrial trainers have come to realize that people respond positively when they have an opportunity to work, to contribute, to become involved in meaningful training exercises. It is hard to trace the roots of this discovery. It was not too long ago when a training session for managers included eighteen holes of golf, a dinner and dance, and a tour of the local brewery or soap factory.

Increasingly, today's managers find themselves moving off to deserted locations, wading through a great deal of prework, prereading exercises, cases—beginning their sessions at eight o'clock in the morning and working through the day with short breaks, and reconvening for late-hour sessions in the evening.

The discovery was made that for

some mysterious reason, the process of learning about management could be stimulating, involving, and ultimately was hard but rewarding work.

Some of the contemporary training designs which are of the greatest popularity and at least at this stage appear to be having significant impact in some company situations demand high levels of energy and intellectual input. They demand a lot of time. In a nutshell, they are hard work and we are discovering once again that McGregor was right—people do respond positively to the opportunity to become engaged in meaningful activity; that they don't need to be entertained and persuaded to learn. Rather, they need to be involved and challenged.

### **Television Management Training**

I am reminded of an old friend of mine, who is a management consultant, who said to me, when I was first beginning in this field, "Look, no matter what situation you get into, whether you are retained by a corporation or asked advice by individual managers, I can give you one basic ground rule which has proven valuable for me. That is, in every instance, view the situation with alarm."

And so, I'd like to follow his advice and view the television education situation with alarm.

### **Videotape Recorders**

First, let's look at some of the under the surface dimensions of the problem. It is hard to find an electronic equipment manufacturer who is not moving rapidly into the field of television, and particularly educational television. The number of videotape recorders on the market today is increasing at a rapid rate. Just as commercial and entertainment television found itself with a huge volume of programming time to fill, so educational television will soon find itself

in the same situation.

Restricting ourselves here to the discussion of industry, in the normal course of my activities, I have visited a variety of installations and have been surprised to find that they have either purchased a videotape or are in the process of setting up some kind of installation.

So, on one hand, we can, I think, expect the manufacturers of hardware to be searching for applications and pushing for utilization. We can certainly expect the user, once he has purchased the hardware, to begin looking for programming and educational inputs. We can, too, I think, expect the various business groups, chambers of commerce, and educational organizations which have found that management education through television draws thousands of people beginning to think in terms of more programming, more input into the educational process.

I think it's also predictable that, within the next three, four or five years that any company will be able to obtain a videotape on almost any subject that is of more than peculiar or unique interest to his own plant.

Television education, as contrasted with other forms of management development and education potentially is inexpensive. It can bring to the viewer well-conceived and well-executed presentations, using a variety of visual techniques, which are hard to imitate at the local level. It provides the potential of bringing leading speakers into direct exposure to plant personnel.

For example, there is now underway a course in political understanding which will include an interview with Richard Nixon and a comparable Democrat. Obviously, a training director at the local level could hardly hope to get Richard Nixon as a guest speaker; but a television education ef-

fort, which may go to as many as ten or fifteen thousand managers is a vehicle which almost any political figure finds it hard to turn down. And by the same token, so does any educator. Teachers and politicians have one thing in common, they both like audiences.

### Reason for Alarm

And so, why view this situation with alarm? Inexpensive education, distributed widely, to large groups of people who perhaps up to this time have had no exposure to management training, good presentations, talented speakers, perhaps national figures, otherwise unavailable. Why be concerned?

The alarm is related to our starting point today. What have we learned about training and development in the last twenty years? What have we learned from our own history? We have learned that information-giving is often not the most critical ingredient in producing effective managerial or supervisory behavior. We've learned that training and development should involve work, an opportunity to become involved, engaged, and challenged in meaningful activity. And yet, the temptation with television is to look for the inspirational speaker, the exciting presenter, the dramatic visual, the entertaining skit. The temptation is to spoon feed the audience with manageable, understandable bits of information, bite-sized, pre-packaged, flavored, and guaranteed to aid digestion.

And in this we can receive ready support from one of the most unimpeachable sources in any field of endeavor—research. We have research that proves that television is better than face-to-face presentation. We have research that shows that a public school teacher dealing with a class face-to-face does not produce as solid an effect as a television teacher, high-

ly qualified, appearing on the screen. Even in a course in English composition taught by television, without the benefit of face-to-face conversation and critique, students learned more than students taught face-to-face. In an army installation it was shown that basic electricity could be more effectively taught to large groups of people through television than was possible in small group sessions led by trained instructors.

### **Advantages of Television**

Clearly, there are a variety of reasons for these findings. One is perhaps the bias of the researcher. Another is that the television teacher often, faced with the presentation of a session which is going to be shown to hundreds of people, makes a much greater investment in preparation. He tries things out, experiments, and makes sure that his presentation is polished and clear-cut. He uses the wide range of visual techniques and presentation methods which television offers. Incidentally, it was found that when teachers didn't use the flexibility of television, their impact was strongly reduced—often to the level, or below the level, of the classroom situation.

Hence, there certainly seems to be a great deal of evidence that in presentation of information and clarification of basic ideas, and perhaps even presenting skills, television has a great many advantages beyond just its capacity to reach large numbers of people at low cost.

But there is also the danger of being misled by the research. Research has been measuring for the most part what people retain regarding English, electricity, or college level courses. It has not been measuring how people apply what they learn, how their operational or on-the-job behavior is influenced. One researcher, after analyzing over 200 of these research efforts, came to

the conclusion that, in many cases, the statistical method, controlled data, and measurement techniques left a lot to be desired.

### **Need for Learning Design**

So, I think we should say cautiously, "Yes, television when appropriately used, can produce better understanding of information and even develop some skill potential in certain areas." But my concern, again, is the ease with which pseudo-educational commercial enterprises can begin turning out "Six Easy Lessons in Cost Control", and I'm sure in the very near future "Fourteen Lessons on How to Get Ahead in Business Without Really Trying."

My alarm, then, is not with the medium. In fact, I think all of us who have worked with it have found it a tremendously exciting opportunity. Certainly my alarm is not with the student or manager who is the participant. Somehow, he is going to continue functioning, whether we have given him the benefit of our insight or not. My alarm is with the quality of educational programming—not the presentation, not the visual aid, but the design of the learning experience itself.

It is my own conviction that the learning and educational process can rarely be sugar coated and highly digestible. This is not because I'm against comfort and ease, but rather because significant learning about management and industrial behavior involves striving, testing, experimenting, challenging, and being challenged—and most of all, working. TV can provide these ingredients.

Let's look at some of the positive potentialities of this medium:

1. First, television can bring management education to almost every corner of the management world at a relatively low cost.

2. Secondly, it can be much more than an information-giving medium or an entertainment or amusement device. It can become an instrument for programming learning experiences, borrowing from the disciplines of programmed instruction and some of the newer techniques of training design which have emerged from the National Training Laboratories, various universities, and individual practitioners.
3. It can provide a vehicle for a much more scientific and systematic approach to learning—placing less reliance on the inspirational quality of a local teacher or conference leader and providing sufficiently strong programming and informational input, as well as experiential training opportunities, so as to insure effectiveness.

### Role of the Trainer

Here, I want to make a point which I think all of us are aware of, but perhaps needs underlining. Increasingly, and certainly in management education, and eventually I suspect in public school education, *the role of the teacher or trainer is being re-evaluated*. Certainly there will always be inspirational instructors, highly skillful artists in their capacity to draw out the reluctant student, to interact in an energetic and productive way with small groups. Certainly the T-Group trainer, the stimulating college professor, the understanding teacher are not soon to be replaced. But on the other hand, there is a growing amount of experience which indicates that we have often overestimated the importance of the role of the trainer and teacher in a great many situations.

Several years ago, Jack Gibb reporting on activities of the Western Behavioral Science Institute, pointed out that even the T-Group, which is often

considered a highly personal and artistic endeavor on the part of the trainer, is operating now without a trainer or leader in many situations; and that at least some of the initial findings seem to indicate that leaderless groups seem to be developing as much insight and learning as has taken place with trainer-led groups.

Certainly, Blake's Managerial Grid has demonstrated that involvement and commitment in a learning situation can occur with very little participation on the part of the trainer. Essentially, the Grid involves leaderless groups, with occasional inputs from an outside source. Kepner-Tregoe's training design, which uses qualified instructors, nevertheless places most of its reliance on a well-conceived and well-executed series of exercises which challenge, stimulate, and stretch the capacities of participants. Some of the recent feedback we've been getting seems to indicate that with careful training designs, relatively untrained local conference directors using programmatic material can involve people in significant learning experiences.

### Program Design and Development

Frankly, one of the most stimulating possibilities in this area, for the trainer, program designer, or educator, is that he can take a subject matter area and design cognitive inputs, reading materials, training exercises, and integrate these with various presentation techniques. He can build in an action training model, and a series of meaningful exercises. He can pretest and experiment with these, refine and polish them, spend several years in developing optimum designs. The size of the student population make it economically and professionally feasible to work in this fashion.

This is, of course, not to say that tailor-made programs, personal confrontation between local managers and

their subordinates, and inplant development are passe. Obviously, they will continue to be the core of management development and education. However, it is to say that in many areas training need not be as hit or miss, as cut and paste as it has often been. I suspect that the challenge to all of us who are directly or indirectly involved in management education will not be to find sufficient courses or programs to fill the educational needs and vacuums which exist in parts of an organization. Rather, the challenge will be to cull out from the growing mass of educational techniques, media, and processes those which are truly effective and productive.

### **Integration**

Finally, one opportunity of television is the potential to merge systematic programmed, well-researched and designed programs with spontaneous, local, tailor-made efforts.

Thus, within the context of a well-designed training exercise, video-tape methods on the spot make it possible for a trainer to develop supportive training exercises or demonstrations

which makes it possible for him to bring the president of his company, a local college professor, or a distributor three thousand miles away into the presence of his own students.

At every level of education, from job skills, technical skills, on up to high level decision making and executive development, it will only be a matter of a few short years before specific programs, carefully designed and tested, and to a large degree proven, will be available for every company. None of these will replace the real people, real personalities, and real problems which are present. However, video tape may soon make it possible to bring education and training into the on-going stream of administrative life. It may make it possible for all of us to stop thinking of training and development as separate and distinct from the process of management and personal growth, but rather to begin to integrate decision making, problem solving, goal setting, and development, and synthesize them into an on-going development process for managers.

## **Parkes To Manage Conference Program**

John B. Parkes, senior instructor of the training and education department of The Foxboro Company, Foxboro, Mass., has been appointed program manager of the 23rd National ASTD Conference in Boston, Warren E. Marshall, assistant vice president of the Liberty Mutual Insurance Companies and conference director, announced recently.

The 23rd National Conference will be held the week of May 8, 1967 at the Sheraton-Boston Hotel. Between 1600 and 1800 members of the society from across the country and around the globe are expected to attend.

Mr. Parkes will be responsible for designing the meeting agenda and planning the overall operation of the Conference.