Research Capsules

Title: The Ten Most Important Practices for Effective Management

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Abstract: In March 1987 the diagnostic and feedback division of Harbridge House, Inc., an international management consulting, training, and research firm, updated a 1984 research study of management qualities judged most important by a diverse sample of American employees. The purpose of the update was to determine whether the same management qualities were deemed most important over time. The study also examined the relationship between the importance ratings for management qualities and the extent to which managers actually exhibited these qualities.

Feedback data, gathered on approximately 6,500 managers from a variety of industries, were used to identify the 10 most important practices for effective management. In order of importance, these were

- making clear-cut decisions when needed;
- getting to the heart of problems rather than dealing with less important issues;
- following up on important issues and actions;
- "leveling" with individuals about their performance;
- being open and candid in dealing with the work group rather than being reserved and cautious;
- clarifying responsibilities within the work group;
- involving subordinates in establishing job-related goals and performance standards;
- discussing performance difficulties with subordinates and soliciting suggestions for overcoming them;
- demonstrating personal commitment to achieving goals;
- establishing and communicating goals for the group as a whole.

In comparison to the 1984 results, the management practices of providing clear-cut decisions and goals, following up on issues and actions, and initiating open two-way communication have retained their high importance value for employees. But study results indicate that employees now place a higher value on leveling with individuals about their job performance and permitting individuals input regarding the goals, standards, and improvement plans directly related to their jobs. Furthermore, employees also demonstrate a greater concern for the honesty, candor, and relevance of performance appraisal than for formality, regularity, and balance between criticism and positive feedback. Another shift from 1984 to 1987 is the increased importance employees place on managers' demonstrating personal commitment to goal achievement.

Examination of the extent to which managers exhibited these practices revealed that employees rated the majority of managers as engaging in almost all practices—not just the top 10—to at least a moderate extent. But the managers did not engage in the "most important" practices to a significantly different extent than the less important practices. It seems that managers have the opportunity to improve their effectiveness by focusing on improving practices that are of greater importance to their subordinates.

The results from the survey update suggest that the management practices employees believe are most important shift over time. A variety of factors—change in the company climate or structure, the work force, the market, or the economy—may precipitate such a shift. The high level of importance employees place on decision-making, goal-setting, and communication practices, however, may prove to be relatively stable over time and conditions.

Title: A Human Performance System Using a Structured On-the-Job Training Approach

Authors: Ronald L. Jacobs, Training and Development Graduate Program, The Ohio State University, Columbus, OH 43210, and Terry McGriffin, Capital City Products, Columbus, OH 43215.

Abstract: In a cooperative venture, the authors implemented a performance system at Capital City Products using structured OJT to train new technicians and certify experienced technicians in the company's manufacturing setting. Additional components of the performance system included a six-hour supervisory coaching program, performance rating checklists used for feedback, and training manuals for technicians and supervisors.

The goals of the system were
- to address deficiencies among new technicians in job knowledge and skills and among supervisors in coaching skills;
- to maintain high supervisory-subordinate social contact during the training process;
- to facilitate performance measurement of current technicians and supervisors;
- to offer an alternative to the present unstructured OJT approach that would provide evidence for its greater cost-effectiveness.

Current results indicate that the program has reduced training time for each new hire from 12 weeks to less than three weeks. The researchers have documented the annualized savings using structured OJT and the additional components of the performance system to be over $20,000. They are now implementing additional plans to assess the effectiveness of the system.

When task and performance outcomes are specified, structured OJT has the following advantages over other training methods, particularly when integrated within a larger performance system:
- It is an efficient means to transmit job information.
- Training occurs in the work setting where performance will occur.
- OJT can provide greater instructional contiguity between skill practice and job performance.
- Trainees receive job information from those who will assess their performance at a later time.
- Interpersonal communications and respect between supervisors and subordinates may improve.
- There are specific roles for the training and development professional. For example, he or she may conduct needs and job analyses, prepare trainee and

supervisor materials, construct performance checklists, prepare OJT trainers, and monitor and assess the effectiveness of the performance system.

Title: Succession Planning Practices in Major Aerospace Companies
Author: Stan Maliszewski, 11420 Grand Circle, Omaha, NE 68143; 402/978-7124 or 402/493-6471.
Abstract: The long-term success of any organization primarily depends on the quality of people who assume its leadership positions. Yet for many organizations the process by which people are developed, identified, and selected for top management roles is relatively unplanned and, in large part, not described. This can result in costly mistakes or contracting with search firms. Companies that practice succession planning largely avoid such costs because they generate their own talent pools.

This study sought to discover commonalities of existing succession planning programs in leading aerospace companies that generate annual revenues of one billion dollars or more and whose total work force exceeds 40,000 employees. The researcher used a case study approach to identify commonalities of succession programs. He surveyed by telephone succession planning administrators from 17 aerospace companies and obtained information from personal interviews and observations, examination of succession documents, and a comprehensive literature review.

One characteristic common to all succession programs is that each program represents a means of insuring a sufficient number of talented, qualified persons to fill key managerial roles in the organizations. A formalized *systems approach* to succession planning also is more efficient for attaining desired goals than a set of informal procedures is. The researcher also found that succession programs in leading aerospace companies commonly include the following components:
■ a set of specific objectives;
■ a definition of who is included in the plan;
■ the use of appropriate documents;
■ policies regarding the development of candidates;

■ support from the chief executive officer;
■ a procedure for identifying and nominating candidates;
■ nominal support and acceptance by managers implementing the plan.

The researcher incorporated into the design of a succession plan findings from the study; organizations proposing a plan to insure the identification and development of a sufficient number of qualified people to satisfy future managerial requirements could use the researcher's design as a guide.

Findings from this study of interest to career planners and adult educators include the following:
■ Seventy-one percent of the aerospace companies surveyed indicated the use of a performance appraisal that included a career-planning component; but only 18 percent rated career-planning and development programs as being very important.
■ All 17 aerospace companies reported that candidates formally identified their developmental needs. Fourteen of the companies reported they used special training programs designed to teach managers how to develop and coach subordinates. Despite these data, however, only seven companies indicated it was "very realistic" to assume that managers would develop and coach their subordinates.
■ Companies made available a variety of developmental methods to meet employees' developmental needs. All but two companies surveyed rated job rotation experiences as a "very important" development activity. Other activities the companies rated as very important are educational programs from outside agencies (11), educational programs within the organization (8), formal training and development (7), special task forces (6), career-development programs (3), and skill assessment centers (3).
■ Although several companies are experimenting with establishing meaningful educational programs, it appears that they budget for outside programs most of the monies allocated for education. One group in a leading aerospace company reported spending more than $400,000 in a nine-month period for tuition reimbursement.
■ In spite of the high cost of university programs, aerospace firms continue to

send potential executives to prestigious schools.

Title: The ICD Survey II: Employing Disabled Americans
Authors: International Center for the Disabled, 340 East 24th St., New York, NY 10010. Contact Donna Fingerhut, director of education and training at 212/679-0100.
Abstract: A 1986 nationwide survey of employers conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for the International Center for the Disabled (ICD) focused on issues concerning the employment of disabled people. The researchers issued the report of the findings in cooperation with the National Council on the Handicapped and the President's Committee on the Employment of the Handicapped.

Researchers conducted telephone interviews with senior managers, chief executive officers, equal employment opportunity managers, and line managers in 920 companies. Results show that disabled workers received high marks on overall job performance and are rated as better or the same as nondisabled employees on their productivity, reliability, attendance, willingness to work hard, desire for promotion, and leadership ability.

The study found, however, that strong performance evaluations did not translate into widespread hiring of disabled people. Most managers believe that their company is presently doing enough to employ disabled people and should not make greater efforts to do so. Only 43 percent of employers questioned said that they had hired disabled employees in the past year. Sixty-six percent cited the lack of qualified applicants as the most important reason the company didn't hire disabled persons.

The new ICD survey also revealed the following:
■ Eight out of 10 top managers say that the costs of employing disabled people are about the same as those for nondisabled. This finding dispels a long-held myth that high costs are a major barrier to the employment of disabled people. Few companies—only 37 percent—have policies or programs for hiring disabled people.
■ A three-fourths majority of managers

reports that disabled people often encounter job discrimination. Most managers think that civil rights laws covering minorities against discrimination should also cover disabled people.

■ Most employers say they are willing to consider employing more disabled people and would be willing to make greater efforts to do so.

Managers expressed strong support for many initiatives to help increase employment of disabled people. The following initiatives were rated the most effective:

■ establishing direct training and recruiting programs with schools and vocational rehabilitation agencies so that employers meet more qualified disabled applicants;

■ having more companies provide in-

ternships or part-time jobs as a way of opening the door to full-time jobs for disabled people;

■ having employers explain specific functional requirements as part of job descriptions so they can match disabled applicants' abilities to available jobs;

■ having the government provide additional tax incentives to promote the employment of disabled Americans.

This research has important implications for HRD professionals who are responsible for hiring disabled individuals. It should also serve to sensitize and heighten supervisors', managers', and coworkers' awareness of their attitudes towards disability.

"Research Capsules" is a quarterly column compiled and edited by Audre Wenzler, director of human resource planning at Coopers & Lybrand. Topics of interest include studies of attitudes or trends in training and development, research on HRD techniques and methods, and other research findings that have clear HRD implications. Send your suggestions for topics, comments, and submissions to Wenzler at Coopers & Lybrand, 1251 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020, or contact her at 212/536-2734. Contributors must include their name, address, and phone number and be willing to respond to reader inquiries regarding their research.