

INSTRUCTIONAL PRE-ANALYSIS

*an underused source of
trainer self-development!*

The rapid growth of training programs in recent years has been accompanied by an increasing flow of pre-fabricated materials for use in these programs. Such off-the-shelf instructional aids as cases, incidents, films, recordings, programmed texts, and games are available to training men in considerable variety. Despite diversity of content and method, an increasing number of these aids exhibit one dominant, common feature, namely, a recommended, pre-planned, prescribed use which is clearly spelled out in detailed instructions provided by the author or publisher. While superficially less true, perhaps, of case materials, they too tend to be accepted by the users as instruments designed for discussion of pre-determined topics.

I would like to suggest that, valuable and welcome as these off-the-shelf offerings may be—and indeed they are—they may well prove to be a professional hazard to the training man who employs them regularly in the form in which they come to him and solely for the purpose described in the instructions governing their use.

Such instruments are “finished products,” which, when utilized only as intended by their authors, may successfully achieve their stated purposes without adequately involving the training man who uses them. He performs solely as an administrator who permits the educational role to be largely discharged by the content, structure, function and purpose that characterizes the particular off-the-shelf material in use on the occasion. This, in my opinion, is not a sufficient role for professional trainers responsible for the creation and utilization of optimal teaching-learning situations.

If perchance you doubt this, recall those times when, faithfully following the instructions accompanying the use of some reputable off-the-shelf instrument, you have suddenly been confronted with sharp, perceptive, ana-

lytical questions from one or more trainees who have discovered that the material being used or the way it is being used, cannot be accepted at “face value.” Unless the trainer has involved himself in a critical, penetrating examination of this material prior to its use, his role effectiveness as an educator may be considerably diminished. And this while he is experiencing success as administrator of the off-the-shelf instrument in question.

PRE-ANALYSIS ESSENTIAL

Pre-analysis of such materials seems to me to be a professional must. It goes far beyond thorough familiarity with the given “instructions for use.” Pre-analysis requires a meticulous, searching, examination of content, structure, stated purpose and methods of off-the-shelf materials. Time-consuming as this process may be—and it is—it offers the only sound basis I know of for determining instructional quality of materials, method soundness, structural strength and relevance of stated purpose to content, structure and method.

More than this, in involving the training man in terms of his professional competence, pre-analysis frequently leads to the discovery of different and sometimes better ways of utilizing these materials, with or without modifications.

When pre-analysis follows the experience of using the off-the-shelf material on oneself before employing it in the training situation, the effective-use pay off is likely to be even greater. Trainer involvement of this kind not only contributes to the effectiveness of the material in the teaching-learning situation in which it is employed, it also functions powerfully as a professional self-development force in improving the performance of a trainer in his educational role.

THE ACTION MAZE

This simple fact is strikingly illustrated in the use of the action maze,

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an unusual supervisory instructional tool appearing in a training resource book entitled, *Dymanic Management Education* by Allen A. Zoll, 3rd.¹ Cast in a form somewhat like a cross between a case and branching type programmed material, the maze sets forth a real-life situation in a series of separate but related episodes. Respondents are required to make individual paper-pencil choices from a limited number of possible courses of action at various points in the episode sequences. Each choice made leads to another choice situation. The choice sequences are generally designed in such a manner as to confront each respondent with consequences of his prior choices.

While no "perfect answer" resolution of the problem is offered respondents, various courses of action contained in the maze may be examined and evaluated from the standpoint of probable effectiveness under the given conditions.

The problems presented in the maze, though never labelled, are set forth in forms of behavior that trigger reaction of some sort from respondents. Because the total situation is revealed to respondents only in gradual stages, from more ambiguous to less ambiguous, they tend to reveal inadvertently certain characteristic features of their problem-solving behavior which may correspond to the way they tend to operate in comparable real-life supervisory situations. Unable to figure out "the perfect" answer, none being offered as such, they fall back on their beliefs, feelings, attitudes, and habits. An unusual opportunity for

summarizing his efforts is provided for each respondent at the end of the maze.

EFFECTIVE GROUP DISCUSSION

Understandably, upon completion of the maze, the stage is set for a lively group discussion which appears to be a major purpose of this material. However, unless the trainer-instructor has carefully pre-analyzed the instrument with regard to content, structure, purpose, and method, he will find himself unprepared to make fully effective use of the learning opportunities suggested by the maze experience. Only by penetrating and painstaking pre-analysis can a trainer perceive critical standards that might be employed usefully in evaluating the maze behavior of the various respondents as this is revealed in their choices and the ensuing discussion.

For example, analysis of the maze structure reveals that the three episodes that compose it escalate in the extent to which they seem to require action. Hence respondents who make response choices for all three episodes that consist in "putting off" dealing with the episode, especially the last of the three, do open themselves to questions about their decision-behavior in situations whose growing urgency does not permit unlimited time for deliberation. Thus both the "demands of the situation" and "respondent choice behavior" provide a rewarding area for examination, analysis and discussion.

Without adequate pre-analysis, the chances are slight that a trainer would be prepared to utilize this opportunity for increasing trainee insight into self. There are other instances in the maze where, undetected by respondents, their choices are frequently at variance with their intent. Unless

the trainer-instructor has identified these possibilities in advance by a careful analytical study of the instrument he is not likely to even know the teaching-learning opportunity that has been missed. In fact, without general guidelines relevant to the actual content, structure, purpose and method of this teaching aid, the lively discussion that invariably follows completion of the maze is frequently suffocated by the vary intellectual wind it has generated.

OTHER OPPORTUNITIES

Other materials similar to that contained in the action maze demonstrate with convincing force what may be lost by failure on the part of trainers to invest the time and thought required by pre-analysis... and also what is to be gained thereby. In short, trainer pre-analysis and self pre-training in the use of off-the-shelf materials is essential if full training value of the materials is to be realized.

Selected films can be re-programmed to achieve purposes other than those intended by producer or author.

Cases can be edited and re-worked, presented in incomplete form for completion by respondents, programmed instructional sequences can be followed by samples of unlabelled behavior relevant to the learning the programmed instruction was intended to produce to determine actual degree of learning and learning transfer success.

The possibilities are limited only by the professional competence of the trainer, his analytical skill, his teaching-learning imagination, and his willingness to devote the time required to "pre-train" himself in the use of off-the-shelf materials.

¹Allen A. Zoll, 3rd. *Dynamic Management Education*, Management Education Associates, Seattle, Wash.