CONFRONTATION IS THE MEDIA OF CHANGE

trainer training needed for assuming high-risk roles in managing change

QUINTIN W. GUERIN

Mr. Guerin has extensive training experience and is employed in a training capacity with a federal government agency which does not necessarily endorse the viewpoints expressed in this article.

Confrontation has become the media of dissent, yet it can be a tool for causing change to happen.

No term is more descriptive of what's been happening in the late sixties than the term "confrontation." In its emotional or newspaper context it provokes fear, disgust, anger, and anxieties in those who resist the sought after change of the confronters. However, to the youth, the college students, the alienated, the militants, and the advocates of change, confrontation is a real, viable term.

Webster defines *confront* as:

1. to stand facing or opposing
2. to face; stand before or meet face to face
3. to face boldly, defiantly or antagonistically
4. to bring (a person) face to face with and, confrontation, a face-to-face meeting.

You may ask, is there a place for this term in the lexicon of the training and development profession? I think there is, because it has operational relevance.[1] To us, confrontation can become a media to use in helping people, groups, and institutions deal with critical issues and dichotomies that need to be resolved. Operationally, the term depicts a situational setting where two or more cognitive factors come into contact with each other with the purpose of comparing or discerning likenesses and differences. These cognitive factors can be a concept, symbol, object, behavior, person, institution, idea, philosophy, principle or value system.

Descriptively, as a media of change, confrontation is a process of reflecting a cognitive factor against the thing it purports to be. In the language of the "sixties," it's a feedback process, designed to depict distortions more so than a replica of the factors being compared.

By definition, these confrontation processes violate the principle of general semantics, which states that context is as important to meaning as substance. As the confrontation process is being used by groups advocating change, they do not call attention to what is right about a situation, act or policy, but rather, the incongruities, illogics, deviations, and mistakes that are revealed.

Using confrontation processes, in the feedback phase of employee development work does call for taking situations out of context in order to call attention to discrepancies between such things as:

definition and examples
principles and practices
attitudes and values
opinions and beliefs
saying and doing
like you want it to be, and like it is

Feeding back the correct responses to what is being taught in our developmental programs is a vital function of the educator roles we play. I do not advocate that we underplay the reinforcement learning principle that positive feedback provides, rather, I see confrontation as a term that is more descriptive of the "conscience" role training and employee development professionals are being asked to play.[2]

WHY THE CONCERN

In the literature on Management Training[3] our critiques have been quite forceful in raising questions about the lack of apparent carryover of courses and other developmental efforts on to the job. The issues they raise largely deal with the fact that managers in training situations operate in an encapsulated world where the issues of gaps between principles and practices, between what they say and what they do, and what they profess to value and what they demonstrate in performance are not dealt with in any significant or meaningful way. Furthermore, we are told that the environment back on their jobs is not conducive to the practice of the processes or principles learned in the encapsulated development world we structure.

A professional does not rest easy when these situations are called to his attention.[4] He confronts management when

the job environment does not reinforce what management says it wants covered in his courses. His planning strategy causes him to construct activities that force learners to the act on the gaps in behavior between principles and practices.

COGNITIVE DISSONANCE — A REQUISITE FOR CHANGE

In some very meaningful ways behavioral scientists have given us ways of utilizing the media of confrontation to bring about actual changes in individuals, groups and institutions. The theory of cognitive dissonance as developed by Leon Festinger[5] is the focal point. It refers to a kind of disharmonious set of relationships which has been aroused within individuals. It's as ... "If a person knows two things, for example, something about himself, and something about the world in which he lives which somehow does not fit together."[6] According to this theory, where there is dissonance, there will be corresponding pressures to reduce the dissonance, the magnitude of these pressures, depending upon the magnitude of the dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is postulated on the theory that individuals are motivated to seek consistency — usually consistency first with self-esteem and secondarily with logic or reality.[7] While a person will typically strive for both kinds of consistency, consistency with self-esteem is probably a more compelling consideration than consistency with logic or reality.[8] Inconsistencies referred to above might be between the following cognitive factors:

1. Attitudes
2. Attitudes and Values
3. Values
4. Values and Behavior
5. Behaviors

The role of the professional who uses confronting techniques is to help the person work through toward resolution or reduction of the dissonance he may have helped to create within the individual. This calls for the application of certain human relations skills, and techniques that one can come by through study and practice. In many of the references I have included in this article, the authors discuss how professionals can acquire these competencies.

INTRODUCING COGNITIVE INCONSISTENCY

In attempting to cause change to occur through the media of confrontation it would appear that the greatest pay-off should come about by bringing into an inconsistent relation two or more self-esteem values that an individual holds. Inconsistencies which implicate such values should be viewed as emotionally upsetting and the effects of such inconsistency to dissipate slowly. Dr. Rokeach tells us that there are three main methods for inducing a state of inconsistency between any of the cognitive factors listed earlier. "First a person may be induced to engage in behavior which is inconsistent with his attitudes and values. Second, a person may be exposed to new information from a credible source which is inconsistent with information already represented within his value-attitudes system. Thirdly, expose the person to information about the states of inconsistency already existing within his own value-attitudes system."[9]

Feeling of inconsistency may be induced not only by creating it, but also by exposing to self-awareness inconsistencies already existing within the system below the threshold of awareness.[10]

It is in the process of inducing, creating, and resolving these inconsistencies that the training techniques of role playing, case studies, simulation, sensitivity groups, management grids, counseling, etc., become most relevant.

BECOMING RELEVANT IN OUR ORGANIZATIONS

In the literature of our profession authorities from a number of fields have been encouraging us to play more dynamic roles in our organizations.[11] They have said that training and development can become one of the most relevant functions in an organization's future. They look to us to help organizations and people deal with change. They look to us to play conscientious roles for top management. They look to us as the internal consultants of the human side of the enterprise. They look to us as the avant-guarde, to take the findings of the behavioral sciences and reality, test them in our development programs and ultimately translate these into behavior and practices in the work environment. To play these internal consultant and change agent roles, the authorities are saying that we have to become greater risk takers. We have to learn how to help people to deal with change and manage change. To do this, we need to become proficient in playing the kinds of confrontation roles implied in these new behaviors expected of us.[12]

From my readings of the research in how behavioral change is influenced, I have to conclude that a training man who wants to be relevant in the "70's," will no longer hesitate or shy away from playing the confrontation role. He will welcome these opportunities and build into his individual style, techniques which are effective for him. This does call for his taking risk and standing up to be counted when he senses states of dissonance or incongruities — not only in his classes, but on the job, and in executive conferences — especially when he sees management practices being sanctioned which violate what management is advocating in its literature, in its training, in its orientation courses, and in its management development programs.

LEARNING HOW TO CONFRONT

As stated earlier, adopting a confronting posture calls for the acquisition of considerable self-insight and the application of human relation skills, none of which comes easy. Yet they can be learned. What's important to us as training and

development professionals is that things are happening right within our environment which give opportunities to acquire these skills and to get feedback on their application.

Below, I have listed some things that might be helpful in learning how to utilize the media of confrontation:

1. Get to know yourself, your needs and your own value system. You may need to begin by a self-confronting exploration process.

2. Take as many psychological, personality and value assessments, tests or instruments as possible. Interpret your score against norms and profiles of people you identify with. Better still, have these interpreted by trained professional psychologists.

3. Attend a sensitivity lab in order to gain self-insight and to establish a frame of reference for interpreting group processes and leadership styles.

4. Attend a personal growth lab (an extension of T-group experience) or attend a conflict or encounter lab where people with different values systems interact.

5. Take training in how to conduct, structure and critique role playing exercises.

6. Counsel and coach your own subordinates and clerical employees.

7. Practice giving and getting feedback using various forms of meetings, sessions and conferences as the frame of reference.

8. Practice learning how to critique instructors and conference leaders who instruct for you.

9. Built into conference leadership and instructor training courses process observations on what leaders and members did to facilitate the on-going processes. Become skilled at interpreting the task and maintenance roles being played by participants in these sessions.

10. Conduct appraisal interviewing training and work at critiquing participants in their demonstration interviews.

CONCLUDING STATEMENT

While there is some logic behind the order of the skills and insights listed above, I would strongly advocate that a training director, in the process of becoming an effective confronter begin by getting to know himself first. This would be a prerequisite for one expected to adopt some of the more high-risk roles implied in this article. Also, implied in all efforts to influence an individual's behavior is the reciprocity principle: "You can try to change me, if I have the right, in turn, to try to change you ... " In the language of the street, and the young, a confronting individual is one who "tells it like it is."

In time, this may become the operational definition of the more meaningful roles training and development professionals may be asked to play. Then they may pay us a real professional compliment, and say of us: "He tells it like it is — and we love him for it because he does."

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12. In the book, *Managers for Tomorrow*, published by the New American Library, 1965, pp. 320, the staff of Rohrer, Hibler and Replogle sets forth the kinds of challenges managers and organizations of the future will be confronting.