A REPORT FROM McDONNELL DOUGLAS
ON GETTING CARRYOVER TO THE JOB

SUPERVISORY TRAINING *CAN* BE MEASURED

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"This was a great training program. I learned a lot I can apply on my job."

"The instructors did an outstanding job. It was one of the most stimulating programs I have ever attended."

"There was never a dull moment. Both the theoretical and the practical were covered in the proper proportion. I know I will be a better supervisor as a result."

"It was refreshing to be involved in a real workshop rather than listening to a bunch of lectures. I know the involvement exercises will help me on my job."

Do these sound familiar? They should — they are typical of responses we frequently get on the evaluation sheets passed out at the conclusion of a supervisory training program. On the one hand, they are self-gratifying in that we apparently came over well in the classroom. But, so what!! How does that make a buck for the company? What evidence do we have that our training has real on-the-job impact?

Every one of us who has been in management training for any length of time has either asked himself or, more embarrassingly, has been asked these questions. To answer them, we decided to develop some means of measuring on-the-job application. The result of our exercise during the first year has proved to be a training bonanza beyond our most optimistic expectations.

Simply stated, a participant in one of our supervisory training programs has *not* completed the program at the conclusion of the scheduled class sessions. He must commit himself to specific objectives on how he will apply some of what he has learned. Then, he must send in a progress report 60 days later to earn his Certificate of Completion.

Positive Values

Such a relatively simple approach has identified positive values in five specific ways:

1. *Commitment* — First and foremost, the voluntary commitment which the participant makes has proved to be a major incentive in bringing about on-the-job application. We say "voluntary" because *he* selects the specific actions he wants to pursue and he is *not* required to have it approved by his superior. He becomes his own taskmaster with the training organization serving as his conscience.

2. *Thinking "Objectives"* — For many new supervisors, this is the first time they have faced the requirement to think specifically in terms of measurable objectives. This has provided the impetus to apply objectives in other aspects of their jobs and can serve as a conditioning for later training in management by objectives.

3. *Communicating with Superiors* — Each participant has a meaningful tool with which he can more effectively communicate with his superior about the training program as well as his job. This has resulted in several instances of a much better working relationship between the two.

4. *Measuring Training Effectiveness* — While most results report-

ed cannot be statistically validated, this has provided us with valuable feedback of a specific, rather than general, nature. We have been able to identify some aspects of our training that are especially useful on the job and we have modified other parts to make them more meaningful. Furthermore, we have some reasonable evidence we *are* "making a buck for the company."

5. *"Customer" Relations* — Finally, we have a tool that has been favorably received by the superiors of our participants and which is helping to create a more receptive climate for our training.

Results

Results thus far have been gratifying, to say the least — approximately 96 percent of the more than 500 participants during the first year sent in their progress reports. Here are a few of the more popular activities selected by participants for the setting of their own objectives:

Inventory of present job capabilities within the group and subsequent cross-training.

Assignment of operational work, previously done personally by the participant, to qualified subordinates.

Improved interviewing techniques with employees, superiors and peers to discuss such subjects as performance, responsibilities and coordination.

Individual breakdowns of job duties and procedures within the group.

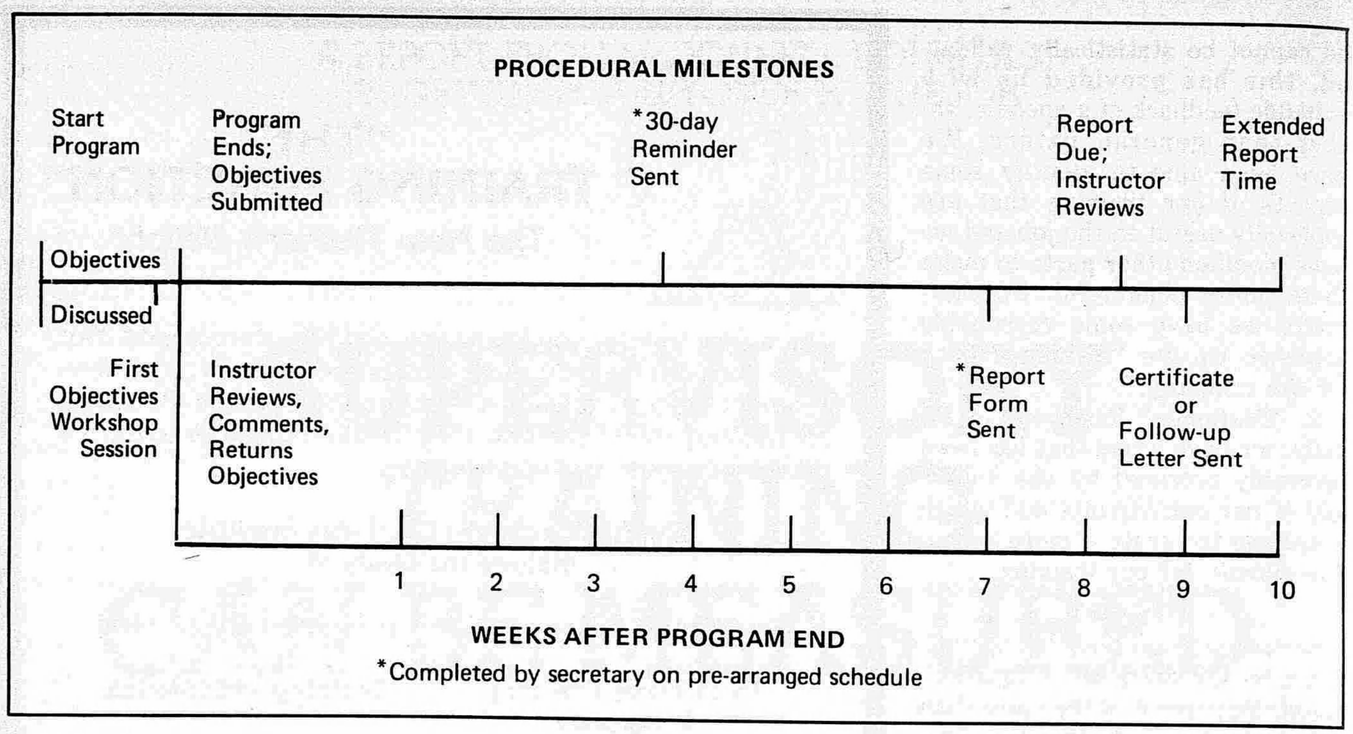
Planned improvements of coordination efforts with other departments, groups and shifts.

Participants, when implementing their objectives on the job, often did much better than they had expected. Here are some of the specific objectives that have been submitted and the results that were reported after 60 days:

Objective: To record the source of errors in the group and correct them.

Result: Error rate decreased by 60 percent in three months through discussing problems with employees.

Objective: To meet with two employees each week to discuss



problems and improve job performance.

Result: Four employees' production increased approximately 10 percent. Another employee, who had a low production record previously, received the Employee-of-the-Month award in the department.

Objective: To improve personal relationship with the union committeeman.

Result: Number of grievances filed was reduced to zero in a two month period. (We were afraid to ask what the number was before!)

Objective: To insure coverage of work during layoffs, vacations and illnesses.

Result: 36 people, collectively, can perform 24 additional tasks providing the necessary flexibility and depth.

Objective: To develop a departmental plan to get more employees to areas where the workload is heavy.

Result: Plan adopted by department management with a definite reduction in overtime.

Participants, more often than not, have been "turned on" when they saw what they themselves could achieve on the job once they sat down and established definite goals. As an added incentive, we have encouraged those whose results showed cost reduction possibilities to submit their achievements through their own departments.

Methodology

In each of the many subject areas we discuss during a given program (e.g. communications, motivation, training employees, leadership, etc.), we ask the participants how they can apply what they have learned. Ideas from these discussions frequently stimulate additional ideas from other participants. We suggest at the time that they make note of these ideas to use when we work on objectives.

When we reach the objective-setting session toward the end of the program, we quickly review the subjects covered and remind participants of the specific ideas that were discussed. Then we ask them to consider what aspects of their jobs they want to improve through objectives.

We ask for at least two (but no more than four) objectives — one for their personal performance and one for the performance of their organizational units. The only guidelines are that the objectives must be related to material in the program and that there must be a good chance for significant progress within 60 days.

We brainstorm together for ideas and then, inevitably, someone raises these questions:

"I want to spend more time talking with my people, but how will I measure the results?"

"What do you want to accomplish by talking with them?"

"Well, I don't feel I know them as well as I should — you know, how they feel about their jobs, where they want to go in the company, things like that."

"Okay, anybody have some suggestions for him?"

"Yeah, sit down and talk with each one of them."

"But I don't have time to do that. I've got 20 people. I can't take a week off and talk to all of them."

"How about setting a schedule of two or three conversations a week until you have seen everyone? Is that a realistic target?"

"Sure."

"Fine! This way you'll be able to meet your objective of finding out more about your people and, as a result, you should be able to do a better job of supervising them."

After this session, we ask them, as a homework assignment, to take a first cut at setting their own objectives. Then we have them critique each other in small groups, looking for specific goals, logical steps toward the goals and good possibilities for positive results. After last minute changes, the participants submit their objectives in final form and the instructor reviews and comments in writing on each one before returning it. From that point on, except for reviewing the reports, the operation is largely a routine clerical activity.

Procedure

Here is a chronological checklist of how we proceed in implementing our approach.

1. Discuss objectives, and their relation to what participants are learning, throughout the entire program.

2. First "objectives" workshop session (one to two hours, next to last day).
   a. Brainstorm for ideas on what to select.
   b. Establish means for measurement.
   c. Establish writing format.

3. Homework — participants write rough draft of objectives they wish to submit.

4. Second "objectives" workshop session (one to two hours, last day).
   a. Critique rough drafts in small groups.
   b. Critique one "on the floor" from each small group.
   c. Participants rewrite (if needed) and submit to instructor.

5. Instructor reviews, comments in writing and returns to participants, keeping a copy of each for reference.

6. Follow-up (largely clerical).
   a. Form letter sent to each participant after 30 days reminding him he will be receiving a report form in about three weeks and encouraging him to keep working at his objectives.
   b. Report form sent to each participant one week before due date asking the following questions:
   (1) What results, both positive *and* negative, have you had so far in implementing your objectives? (Include any appropriate documentation you may have.)
   (2) What other specific changes have you made in the way you do your job as a result of the training program? Please describe the results of these changes, both positive *and* negative.
   (3) Based on your on-the-job experience since the end of the program, what two aspects would you change to make the program more meaningful for people in positions like yours?
   c. Instructor receives completed report, reviews and either approves it for a certificate or contacts the participant for additional action as needed.
   d. Certificate sent with cover letter to participant's superior asking that it be awarded to him at an appropriate time.
   e. Follow-up letter sent to all participants who have not returned their reports one week after deadline allowing them an extra week in which to report and opening the door for individual consultation if needed.

We recognize that this is far from a foolproof system. We are realists enough to know that some of the reports we receive are little more than "smoke" and that some objectives selected are trivial. The important results of this exercise, however, are not from the objectives themselves. Getting participants to make a written commitment to improvement action, whatever its nature, is really our prime purpose. That, together with the other four positive values we identified — thinking "objectives," communicating with superiors, measuring training effectiveness and "customer" relations — has given our supervisory training programs a meaning far beyond our previous efforts. We have gained a tremendous return for a very modest investment. We heartily recommend it.

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SUPERVISORY TRAINING CAN BE MEASURED — AN UPDATE

In the nine years since this article was first published, this approach to reinforcing the learning process has continued to be a standard part of my training and consulting practices. It has given our clients a distinct plus in services rendered, as compared with training and consulting efforts that do not have a built-in forcing action. Furthermore, as consultants, the use of this approach has provided us with an excellent opportunity to open discussions related to other training and consultant needs the client may have.

We are still following the approach essentially as it was originally introduced at Douglas, with a few modifications. We use it principally in connection with our MOR (Management by Objectives and Results) implementation seminars as well as with many of our other management and organization development efforts. We ask participants to set two objectives at the conclusion of our formal training sessions which they turn in to us.

One objective is for organizational improvement and the other is for personal improvement (which does not have to be job-related). This supports our conviction that MOR (MBO) must meet personal as well as organizational needs if it is to be effective in an organization. We make specific written comments on each, retain photo copies of them, and return them to the participants in individual sealed envelopes within a week. (Our commitment to participants is that this is a private agreement between each of them and us as consultants. No one else in their organization will see their objectives unless *they* choose to share them.)

Approximately seven weeks later, we send out a report letter with the photocopy of each participant's objectives attached, once again in individual sealed envelopes, which we ask them to complete and return within two weeks. We summarize the returns, quoting individuals only when permission to do so has been granted, and send that to the client along with completion certificates for those who have returned their reports.

Some comments:

- We get an average response of 60 to 70 percent, including a few that inevitably come in shortly after completion certificates have been sent to the client (we send certificates for those, too).
- Results range from individuals who have really applied the process and report some rather spectacular successes to those who, obviously, are just "playing the game." Most report some progress and appear to be making an effort.
- Our clients frequently express both surprise and appreciation that we go that extra step to increase the probability of on-the-job application of what has been taught in our seminars.
- Training departments in several of our client organizations have adopted this practice with their own programs, after seeing its value in ours.
- We have included this as a recommended follow-up and reinforcement technique in the seminar leader's kits provided with our *Women and MORe* (audiocassette) and *How to Get Organized* (videocassette) programs.

While this approach does take a few extra hours of effort by the trainer/consultant to complete the individual comments (I am often able to accomplish this on the plane returning from an assignment) and the report summary, the extra value to the client and to us, as consultants, has made the use of this approach one of our most productive returns on investment. — *George L. Morrisey*