

The Competent Trainer

More Needed Than "Face Validity"

David A. Nordlie

It is generally assumed that training is one of the most important functions of manpower management. If the goals of an organization are to be attained, its employees must acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes required to perform their jobs proficiently. Training is the means for attaining this end, or so it is assumed. This emphasis upon training extends to all levels of the organization and to all employees, both new and old. The costs of these training programs run into the millions of dollars annually.

A survey by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston of 210 New England manufacturing firms provides one estimate of the cost of training.¹ In these New England firms, alone, over 70 million dollars are spent annually for training. This is equivalent to one-eighth of their annual outlay for new plants and equipment.

How can this expense be justified? The usual answers are: Our competi-

tors are doing it, so we have to. It sounds like a good idea. It gives our trainers something to do. It seems to produce good results. Training is accepted as a worthwhile activity because it has face validity (on the face of it, it looks valid).

According to Maier, the acceptance of training "has been accomplished despite the fact that there have been very few studies published demonstrating the value of training."²

McGehee and Thayer state that "there are frequent references, both oral and written; to the necessity for evaluating training, but there is little evidence of any serious efforts in this direction."³

The Neglected Trainer

The concern of this article is not with the whole question of the effectiveness of the various types and methods of training. Some attention is being given to this problem as exempli-

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fied by the research of Mahoney, et al., on the effectiveness of the "boss-involved" and "standard care" methods of training.⁴

The trainer, however, has largely been neglected by those applying the effectiveness yardstick. In view of the time and money spent in training and in selecting employees to be given training, it would seem appropriate to raise some questions. How much time and money are used in selecting and training the person who does the training? Who is the most competent trainer? What are his characteristics? Under what conditions and with what persons is he most effective? Can trainers be selected on the basis of their potential competence as trainers?

It should be noted that answers to some of these questions are not lacking. They can be found in several manpower management and training textbooks. According to DePhillips, et al., effective instruction is a function of job knowledge, teaching skills, experience, personality, trainer attitudes, communications, and management.⁵ The importance of these factors is shown by examples of what occurs between "Mr. A" and "Mr. B" by the five important "I's" of Intelligence, Information, Initiative, Integrity and Ingenuity, and by old sayings such as "character is more caught than taught." Who is qualified to train?

Planty, et al., state, "A qualified instructor must (1) be familiar with the subject or skill or attitude to be taught, (2) know how to teach it effectively, and (3) want to teach it."⁶

It is not the purpose of this article to argue the truth or falsity of the above claims. It rather raises a question that seems to have been overlooked. Has any systematic research been done to verify such generalizations or are they based on "face validity"? Are the factors involved in trainer competence all of equal importance?

If not, which are the most necessary to effective training? Can effective training be carried out by a trainer who lacks several of these characteristics but is very strong on several others?

Mahoney, et al., emphasize the importance of not stopping with "face validity." They insist that, "face validity is not sufficient in the evaluation of management training activities . . . a somewhat more objective evaluation is required."⁷

Some Leads

The implication of what has been stated is that some objective yardsticks, which could be used to evaluate trainer competence, are needed. Research has been conducted on a question which is very closely related to trainer competence—the question of teacher competence. It is obvious that there are differences between the public education situation and the industrial or business training situation. Both, however, involve learning situations. If one can generalize from white rats to humans, it should not be too difficult to generalize from public education to business training. It must always be kept in mind, however, in making comparisons, that these are persons with different characteristics in somewhat different situations.

It should be recognized that there is a long way to go in identifying the factors that are involved in teacher competence. Barr and Jones state that, "while immense amounts of time and thought have been given to the criteria of teacher efficiency, researchers continue to find low correlations among the more important of the criteria such as supervisory ratings, measures of pupil growth and achievement, pupil evaluations, and teacher tests of what are thought to be fundamental knowledge, attitudes, and skills."⁸

The field of education, however,

does recognize the important of measuring teacher competence and selecting competent teachers, and much research is being currently undertaken on this question.

What Can the Training Director Do?

If the training director believes, as the writer does, that it is important to select the most competent trainers available, and that this can only be done by establishing some objective yardsticks of competence based upon sound research methods, there are several things he can do.

1. He can become familiar with the educational journals which report research being done on the question of teacher competence. These would include, among others:

- The Journal of Experimental Education*
- The Journal of Educational Research*

- The Journal of Teacher Education*
- The Journal of Educational Psychology*

The Review of Educational Research

2. He can get a copy of one of the best summaries of research on teacher competence available. This is the *Wisconsin Studies of the Measurement and Prediction of Teacher Effectiveness*, by A. S. Batt, et al.⁹

3. He can use the methods and findings of research on teacher competence as a basis for setting up his own research on trainer competence.

A. The findings of studies on teacher competence can be used as hypotheses to test in the business setting. Examples of such hypotheses might include:

- (1) Trainers who have been "certified" are more competent than those who have not.¹⁰
- (2) Trainers who are warm and

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friendly produce more self-initiated and required work in their students.¹¹

- (3) Social competence is an important factor in trainer competence.¹²
- B. The methods and techniques used in evaluating teacher competence can be adapted to the industrial situation. The training director can initiate in his organization a program for evaluating trainer competence. This could involve the following steps:
- (1) Some objective criteria of competence should be identified. One of the reasons for not defining the term "trainer competence" is that it must be done operationally. Many different criteria of competence

can be used: the director's "judgment" of competence; measurable changes in trainee behavior, etc. The second criterion is, in the writer's estimation, the best.

- (2) The characteristics of trainers which are related to his competence should be identified perhaps through the use of factor analysis and correlation analysis.
- (3) Future trainers should be selected on the basis of these characteristics.

Something more than just "face validity" is needed to justify the considerable responsibility placed upon the trainer and the relatively high cost of the training function.

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