Management Training Evaluation: An Update

Results of this study indicate that evaluation of management training programs is still not what it could be.

By WILLIAM H. CLEGG

Although management training evaluation is often a difficult process, it must be done. Management training requires an investment of time and money which, like any other type of investment, must be justified on the basis of the return from that investment. The following study indicates that current management training program evaluation methods are not as comprehensive as they could be. This lack leads the author to recommendations for improving evaluation methods and choosing and designing more suitable training programs based on ease of evaluation.

Study background

The study covers management training programs for first-line supervisory positions and above that are sponsored by large industrial corporations. The programs include on- and off-site, in-house programs, programs developed by outside agencies, programs involving either two- or four-year colleges or universities, and "canned" programs developed by outside agencies for attendance by supervisors and managers in any interested organization.

As its base, the study used A.P. Sullivan's 1970 dissertation, "An Analysis of Management Training Program Evaluation Practices in American Industry," which obtained information from 50 random *Fortune*-500 industrial corporations. A seven-page questionnaire was sent to those same companies in an attempt to obtain current information on the status of their management training programs. The questionnaire was very similar to the previous one, with a few added questions, opportunities for additional responses to several questions, and some minor changes in the instructions.

Because turnover since 1970 made it improbable that the same individual would be completing the questionnaire, it was directed to to president of each of the organizations with a cover letter explaining the purpose of the study. Forty-three—or 96 percent—of the companies contacted returned the questionnaires. Five companies responded to the cover letters but did not complete the questionnaire, listing insufficient time and corporate policies against participation in studies as their reasons.

Response summaries

The following are the survey questions asked and tables showing percentages or rankings of responses given. Keep in mind that even though the questionnaire was sent to the presidents of the participating corporations, the questions were directed to the chief training officer.

1. *Does your company conduct in-house management training programs?*

This question was designed to determine if any companies that previously utilized in-house courses had discontinued them. Responses showed that 83.7 percent of the companies still conducted in-house programs and 16.3 percent do not. Respondents answering *no* to this question were directed not to answer questions 2, 3, 4, 7, and 10.

Clegg is associate professor of information systems and operations management in the college of business administration at the University of Toledo.

2. *Who conducts the evaluation effort on your in-house management training programs?*

Over three-fourths of the evaluations of management training programs were conducted by the training staff. There apparently was no reluctance on the part of large industrial corporations to have the same group which conducted or sponsored management training programs to also evaluate those same programs.

The *Other* category includes top management, participants, and some combination of these groups.

Who Evaluates Management Training	N	%
The training staff	28	78
An ad hoc committee	3	8
A special group of in-house measurement or control experts	1	3
An outside consultant or specialist	1	3
Other	3	8
Totals	36	100

3. *Indicate your degree of responsibility for management training evaluation.*

Over three-fourths of the chief training officers were either fully responsible for management training evaluation or shared that responsibility with others at the same or higher levels.

Degree of Responsibility	N	%
Fully responsible	20	55
Share responsibility with others at same or higher level	10	28
Share responsibility with others at lower level	6	17
No responsibility in this field	0	0
Totals	36	100

4. *Indicate your degree of authority for management training evaluation.*

Nearly three-fourths of the chief training officers either authorized all or some of the final decisions in matters pertaining to the evaluation of management training programs.

Degree of Authority	N	%
Make all final decisions	11	30
Make some final decisions	15	42
Make decision recommendations to higher authority	10	28
No authority in this field	0	0
Totals	36	100

5. *What do you consider to be the most pressing problem, weakness, or shortcoming you are encountering with respect to the evaluation of formal in-house management training courses?*

Nearly one-half of the large industrial corporations listed lack of standards and yardsticks as the most pressing problem, weakness, or shortcoming with respect to evaluation of in-house management training programs.

Answers in the *All other* category includes "accuracy or honest of comments," "not behavior oriented," and "application of ideas taught to on-the-job situations."

Problem, Weakness, or Shortcoming	N	%
Lack of standards and yardsticks	18	42
Follow-up evaluation	4	9
Trouble with management	3	7
All other	5	12
None given	13	30
Totals	43	100

6. *What short- or long-range changes do you plan to make in your in-house management training courses evaluation program?*

Over one-half of the large industrial corporations did not plan to make any changes in the evaluation of management training programs.

Eleven separate items were mentioned in the *Other* category.

Planned Changes	N	%
None	23	53
Behavioral objectives and changes	5	12
Improve evaluation one to two years following training	2	5
Perfect what are now doing	2	5
Other	11	25
Totals	43	100

7. *Rank, in the order in which you actually rely on them in practice, the following course effectiveness indicators. Use a 1 to indicate which aspect you use most, a 2 to indicate the next most used aspect, and so on until you reach the least often used aspect. Use a 0 to indicate those aspects you do not normally use.*

There was no single overwhelming industry-wide criterion in ranking the order of importance in evaluating a given management training program. The most frequently cited criteria were change in performance on the job, reaction of students to training, and changes in knowledge, skills, or attitudes possessed by the students.

Percentages were calculated after rankings were assigned weighted values.

How Evaluation is Based	Weight in points	%
Change in performance on the job	95	15
Reaction of students to training	68	11
Change in knowledge possessed by student	55	9
Change in skills possessed by student	54	8
Change in attitudes possessed by student	53	8
Change in company operating results traceable to training	53	8
How well the course was planned	46	7
How well the course was presented	38	6
Extent of continued demand for the course	35	6
Reaction of management to the training product	32	5
Extent course was recommended by company management	30	5
Degree of student motivation	17	3
Degree of student participation	16	3
How much the course cost	12	2
Reaction of instructors to course effectiveness	8	1
Reaction of other students, peers, and subordinates to the student	7	1
How well the course was attended	6	1
Reaction of the local training group	6	1
Completion of projects	3	0
Results or needs	3	0
Quality of students selected	2	0
Totals	639	100

8. *Rank, in order of severity, the following possible constraints to your management training program evaluation effort. Use a 1 to indicate the greatest constraint, a 2 to indicate the next, and so on.*

The primary constraint to in-house management training program evaluation efforts was lack of time by the individual responsible for evaluation.

Percentages were calculated after rankings were assigned weighted values. The percentage of each constraint was then multiplied by 43 (the number of respondents to the question) to arrive at the average number of respondents for each type of constraint.

Type of Constraint	Average N	% of Total Weighted Points
Lack of time	13	29
Lack of adequate evaluation methodology	9	22
Lack of money	8	18
Lack of necessity to evaluate	7	16
Lack of expertise	6	15
Totals	43	100

9. *How do you justify management training fund requirements?*

Three-fourths of the large industrial corporations justified management training fund requirements by whatever amount is required for the courses planned, be evaluating results of previous training programs, or by using the previous year's expenditure levels.

The *Other* category included such justifications as "needs identified and approved," "needs analysis," and "ask for funds on programs demanded by top management."

Type of Justification	Average N	% of Total
Whatever is required for courses planned	18	43
By evaluating results of past training conducted	9	21
By using previous year's levels	5	11
By insuring a favorable return on investment	3	6
As a fixed percent of some figure such as last year's profit or sales	1	3
Other	7	16
Totals	43	100

10. *Indicate by a check in the appropriate spaces the degree to which you actually utilize any of the following methods to evaluate your typical management training courses. For some of the questions related to timing, these definitions apply:* before *means prior to course start or during opening sessions of course,* end-of-course *means during closing sessions, and* post-course *means some period of time after course is completed.*

See Figure 1 for results of this question. Less than one-half of the evaluation methods that could be used in evaluating management training programs were actually being used.

Figure 1

Type of Objectives	Evaluation Method	Degree Method Used to Evaluate Typical Management Courses: Always Used	Used 50–90% of the Time	Used 10–50% of the Time	Never Used
INTERNAL	Informal collection of passing comments	12	8	6	10
	A set of anecdotal records is kept	3	3	9	21
	Evaluation is based on attendance records	1	4	10	21
	Evaluation is based on student participation	6	14	8	8
	Evaluation is based on short quizzes given during course	1	6	12	17
	Hour-by-hour student reaction reports during course	0	1	1	34
	Observe degree to which principles of learning observed in conducting courses	4	4	11	17
IMMEDIATE	End-of-course student course evaluation sheet	20	11	2	3
	End-of-course report by instructor	11	14	6	5
	End-of-course achievement or performance tests or attitude measures:				
	With a control group used	3	5	4	24
	Without a control group used	1	6	7	22
	Before- and end-of-course achievement or performance tests or attitude measures:				
	With a control group used	0	4	6	26
	Without a control group used	2	6	9	19
INTERMEDIATE	Before- and post-course reaction of superiors, subordinates, and peers to changes observed:				
	With a control group used	1	4	5	26
	Without a control group used	4	7	10	15
	Post-course reaction of superiors to before-course expectations stated	4	8	6	18
	Post-course reaction of superiors, subordinates, and peers to changes observed:				
	With a control group used	2	2	4	28
	Without a control group used	6	4	11	15
	Pre- and post-course achievement or performance tests:				
	With random assignment to control groups	0	3	3	30
	Without random assignment to control groups	1	5	7	23
	Post-course on-the-job survey of trainees (questionnaire or interview)	5	10	13	8
	Post-course achievement or performance test or attitude scale to measure retention and on-the-job behavior	2	3	12	19
ULTIMATE	Before- and post-course survey or operations audit of various aspects of company operations that training is expected to influence	1	4	10	21
	Post-course survey or operations audit of various aspects of company operations that training is expected to influence	1	6	8	21
	Evaluation is based on continued demand for courses	14	10	8	4
	Determine extent to which trainees are progressing (promotion and more pay and responsibility)	4	4	11	17
	Spot checks by outside consultants	1	0	6	29
	Return on the dollar investment in the course	3	3	6	24

11. *Which of the following 12 reasons for management training evaluation do you think the evaluators in industry regard as the three most important reasons? Which three would you regard as the most important if you were going to make a case for evaluation? Use a 1 to indicate the most important reason, a 2 to indicate the second most important reason, and a 3 to indicate the third most important reason.*

The principal reason for evaluating management training programs was to determine if there was a payoff from such programs. Also of importance were determining where improvement is required and measuring progress toward objectives.

Results of this question are based on a weighted point system. The six most important reasons are listed in the table below. The other six possible reasons provided in the questionnaire were: required by higher authority, evaluation is intrinsically good, to help sell training throughout industry, to give trainers a sense of accomplishment, to make trainers feel important, and to determine effectiveness of training staff.

Reasons for Evaluating	Top 3 Industry Reasons Rank	Top 3 Personal Reasons Rank
To determine if there is a payoff*	1	3
To justify existence of the training function	2	—
To measure progress toward objectives	3	2
To find out how training can contribute more	4	1
To find out where improvement is required	5	4
To establish guidelines for future programs	—	5

**Most probable reason*

12. *If your answer to question 1 was* no, *check the reasons you do not now conduct in-house management training courses.*

Of the seven companies which indicated they had discontinued in-house management training programs (in question 1), four indicated that such programs were being conducted by outside agencies, at colleges and universities, or through self-study. The other three companies gave lack of interest by top management, financial reason, or elimination of the training function as the reasons for discontinuance of programs. Some companies listed more than one reason.

Reasons for Discontinuation	N	%
Conducted at outside agencies (AMA-type)	4	30
Conducted at colleges or universities	3	23
Conducted through self-study	1	8
Sub-total—conducted by other than in-house	8	61
Discontinued due to lack of interest by top management	2	15
Discontinued for financial reasons	1	8
Training function eliminated	1	8
Now developing an in-house program	1	8
Totals	13	101

13. *Which of the following 13 reasons for not evaluating management training programs do you think the non-evaluators in the industry regard as the three most important? Which three would you regard as the most important if you were going to make a case for non-evaluation? Use a 1 to indicate the most important reason, a 2 to indicate the second most important reason, and a 3 to indicate the third most important reason.*

The principal reason for not evaluating management training programs was that responsible officials didn't know what to evaluate because of foggy objectives. Also of importance were that some responsible officials did not know how to go about evaluating, and since evaluations were not required in some companies, no attempt was made to evaluate.

Results of this question are based on a weighted point system. The eight most important reasons are listed in the table below. The other five possible reasons listed on the questionnaire are: trainers are afraid of what they may find out, too few trainees involved to make it worthwhile, laziness on the part of the training staff, frightened to try evaluation because of complexity of the process, and previous evaluation results have been misused.

Reasons for Not Evaluating	Top 3 Industry Reasons Rank	Top 3 Personal Reasons Rank
Don't know what to evaluate because of foggy objectives*	1	1
Responsible officials do not know how to go about evaluating	2	3
It is not required, so why bother	3	—
It would probably cost too much	4	—
Training officials do not see the value of evaluation	5	—
Inability to secure necessary cooperation within the firm	—	2
There is probably not enough time	—	4–5
Inability to assemble essential expertise	—	4–5

**Most probable reason*

Study recommendations

A number of important points were brought to the surface as a result of the responses to the questionnaire used in this study. The following comments and recommendations may perhaps assist chief training officers in their decisions concerning evaluations of their management training courses.

- Serious consideration should be given to management training program audits by someone outside the training department, if only on a periodic basis. The outside auditor could be an individual from another corporation, on an exchange basis, or a consultant who specializes in the field of management training. Periodic audits of this type will prevent an organization from becoming too "ingrown" and will instill fresh ideas to revitalize management training programs.
- Each chief training officer should review his or her evaluation methods and attempt to adopt additional evaluation methods, where appropriate, for each type of in-house management training program. This would be particularly important in those companies which presently utilize less than the average of 48 percent of the evaluation methods that could be used.
- Chief training officers should insist that management training programs not be conducted until the training program objectives have been established. If the person who requested a particular management training program is not able to develop training program objectives, it is possible that that particular management training program should not be conducted at that time.
- Very seldom should training of any type be conducted solely for the sake of training itself. Chief training officers should insist that management training program sponsors review the need for a training program and that the sponsors are selective in who attends.
- It is incumbent that chief training officers, or the individuals delegated the responsibility for evaluation of management training programs, be familiar with at least the fundamentals of basic evaluation techniques and research designs.
- Many chief training officers apparently do not have sufficient time to devote to adequate evaluation of management training programs. If this is the case, a chief training officer should convince his or her superior to allot additional funds for this purpose, either through additional departmental personnel or through the use of outside agencies.

LDA WORKSHOPS

Fortune 500 Companies and small businesses with no training departments use LDA workshops on an ongoing basis to develop executives, middle management, supervisors and staff. Ninety per cent of our clients come from referrals.

The Leadership Workshop:
Executives/Middle Management.
A personalized 4-Phase behavior modification program for increased managerial and interpersonal effectiveness.

The Participation Management Workshop:
First-Second-Level Supervisors/Staff.
A personalized 3½ day program to build communications, team effectiveness and employee involvement skills.

For more details, write or call:

LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATES, INC.
99 Kinderkamack Road
Westwood, New Jersey 07675
(201) 666-9494

Circle No. 115 on Reader Service Card