

BY ASSESSING THE COMPETENCIES NEEDED BY A PARTICULAR FIRM, AN INSTRUCTIONAL PACKAGE CAN BE DEVELOPED WHICH WILL SATISFY THE TRAINING NEEDS OF THE ORGANIZATION.

ASSESSING MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY NEEDS

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Managers are often vague or unclear of the training needs of their organization. Frequently, they are unable to identify the roots of the training needs problem. It is often easier to say that the employees are not motivated to do the job than it is to face the unpleasant truth that the real problem may be the inability of the supervisor to give understandable instructions or to design an adequate control system. An unwary trainer may undertake a program to try to improve motivation and morale of the operative employees. After considerable time and expense, the trainer may realize that the individuals most in need of training are the supervisors. The trainer must then try to convince the organization to fund another training program to get at the real problem. If the organization feels that the training which has been done has not been effective, the trainer will probably not get a chance at curing the true problem and may well dampen the willingness of the

organization to undertake any further training programs.

The purpose of this study was to identify the competencies considered most important for management personnel in various industries. Once these competencies have been identified, training programs can then be developed to meet these needs. Individualized instruction might be most helpful in developing certain types of skills while traditional classroom training or in-service training programs might be best for developing other skills. An additional benefit of the research could be to help those persons or firms involved in providing training programs to identify those industries most in need of their particular services.

With these goals in mind, a study was undertaken to identify the skills and abilities most needed by managers in various types of businesses. A literature review and suggestions from employers was used to identify 500 relevant activities. This list of activities was submitted to a panel of consultants who examined them for content validity. The list was reduced to

115 activities to be included on a questionnaire. The survey was then sent to a random sample of firms from the various industries. The person to whom the questionnaire was addressed was obtained by contacting various professional associations for each industry.

After the responses were received, they were combined into the functional areas of communications, leadership, and control. Weighted index values were computed by assigning four points to those activities which were considered essential. Activities considered important by the respondents were given a weighting of three. A composite index was then calculated to show the relative importance of the competency within the industry.

As with any classification system, the categories in which certain competencies were placed was a matter of judgment. For example, many of the skills which were listed as communication skills might also be addressed to some degree in a leadership or control oriented training program. Some of these same skills could also be

Figure 1.
RANK OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCIES*

Competency Statement	Overall		Banking		Distribution		Hospital		Manufacturing	
	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
1. Follow instructions from superiors.	1	1469	1	385	3	359	1	368	1	357
2. Select the right person to perform a task, giving clear instructions and following up on the instructions to insure that the task is correctly carried out.	2	1347	11	277	2	380	2	359	5	331
3. Exchange information with superiors.	3	1325	4	325	15	304	7	340	2	356
4. Use telephone for business communications.	4	1322	2	352	17	295	4.5	353	7	322
5. Utilize the experience and knowledge of others as well as one's own judgment.	5	1321	6.5	295	10.5	339	6	352	4	335
6. Be clear and concise when communicating instructions to be carried out by subordinates.	13	1209	5	315	1	385	20	168	3	341
7. Coordinate company effort by interdepartmental communication.	18	1164	18	249	20	268	10	334	9	313
8. Inform superiors of plans and objectives for both short and long-term periods.	19	1159	20	233	16	299	14	322	14	305
9. Read company memorandums and reports.	20	1045	12.5	275	19	273	19	208	18.5	289

*Those competencies having equal index values were assigned the mean of the ranks for which they were tied.

incorporated into a planning or organizing category which was not utilized in this study.

Whatever classification system is utilized, the main concern is the relative importance of the competencies identified and the variations in importance of these attributes as reported by the employers studied. Once these training needs are identified, it is possible to develop appropriate content and delivery methods for training programs. Authorities have often pointed out that what organizations think they want may not be what they really need. The trainer needs to be cautious in developing program content which will get at the source of a problem rather than its symptoms.

The Greatest Needs

Communication: The most frequently needed competencies identified were in the area of communication. Figure 1 shows the various competency statements associated with communication coupled with the calculated overall and industry index values and ranks. Only the highest 20 of the 115 competency

statements were reported. It is worth noting that nine of the 20 competencies involve some form of communication skills. The most important of the communication skills relate to the ability to exchange information or clarify instructions with the supervisor, peers, and subordinates. The ability to utilize the experience and knowledge of others is also a very desirable competency for managers to possess. If managers are unable or unwilling to ask questions of their superiors or peers when they are not certain of the assigned tasks, it is impossible to clearly communicate the instructions to the subordinates. It will be equally difficult for the subordinate's performance to conform to the expectations of the organization or its management.

These communication competencies seem to be the most highly ranked of the competencies by all industries except distribution. In distribution related firms, the ability to exchange information with the superior, use the telephone, and to utilize the assistance

of others ranked in the lowest fourth of the 20 skills discussed. The ability to select the right person and to give instructions was ranked lower by banking and financial firms. Possibly, this may be because work assignments are less flexible than they would be in a hospital, manufacturing firm, or with a distributor.

Written communications appear to be more important in medical and manufacturing firms than in distribution and banking and finance related businesses. While the ability to communicate through interdepartmental memos ranked quite low overall, these competencies were considered of moderate importance in manufacturing and medical firms. This might be partially explained by the need to inform and/or involve others where developing plans and objectives. Again, the more dynamic nature of manufacturing and medical firms could explain the relative importance of these competencies, whereas, a clear definition of duties and responsibilities could achieve the same results in the less

Figure 2.
RANK OF CONTROL COMPETENCIES

Competency Statement	Overall		Banking		Distribution		Hospital		Manufacturing	
	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
1. Tactfully identify mistakes employees have made and help them constructively correct them.	8	1284	3	341	18	293	13	329	8.5	321
2. Effectively handle the complaints of subordinates.	9	1264	14	269	12	333	5	353	12	309
3. Follow proper channels of authority in the business organization.	10.5	1256	12.5	275	4	356	9	335	17	290
4. Clearly define the duties of each individual and the standards of performance against which these are measured.	12	1234	17	251	10.5	339	3	355	18.5	289
5. Develop and maintain effective control so that an orderly group effort results.	14	1200	19	213	8	344	11.5	332	11	311
6. Identify any deviation from plans and take appropriate steps to correct the deviation.	15	1196	16	253	13	326	15	316	16	301

dynamic banking and distribution firms.

Control: Control related competencies are discussed in Figure 2. Overall, the most highly ranked of these skills pertain to the tactful handling of mistakes and complaints. It was considered important that managers be able to clearly define duties and responsibilities within their areas of authority. Managers were also expected to be able to develop an effective control system which would allow them to identify deviations from the plans and to take corrective action to alleviate

the problem.

The importance of these competencies seemed to vary widely with the industry. Banking and financial firms considered the ability to develop and maintain an effective control system as relatively unimportant. Such control systems are currently well developed in these firms and normally take very little maintenance to keep them functioning. This structuring of jobs is not as easily accomplished by managers in other industries.

The ability to handle complaints and to clearly define duties and standards of performance were

considered more important for medical personnel than for the other industries studied. Sensitive handling of patient complaints and clearly defined duties seem to be especially important in the medical industry where minor mistakes could be quite harmful to the patient or customers. These are competencies which could also be related to the communication skills and might be included in training programs teaching either control or communication skills.

The ability to follow channels of authority was considered especially important in the field of distri-

Figure 3.
RANK OF LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES

Competency Statement	Overall		Banking		Distribution		Hospital		Manufacturing	
	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value	Rank	Value
1. Set example of optimum performance, attitude and behavior.	6	1313	6.5	295	5	355	8	338	6	325
2. Create an environment in which each member of the organization, unit, or department believes that his contributions or efforts are important and worthwhile.	7	1290	9	283	6	354	11.5	332	8.5	321
3. Determine from alternatives the most efficient way to accomplish a task.	10.5	1256	8	289	7	352	16	308	13	306
4. Define duties and responsibilities of each subordinate.	16	1189	15	261	9	341	17	301	20	286
5. Give praise to subordinates for personal achievement and accomplishment.	17	1188	10	280	14	316	18	290	15	302

"Experimenting with new ways to administer medication and work methods is not within the scope of most hospital employees."

bution. This would appear to indicate a greater degree of centralization in this industry. The reliance on authority could also explain the lack of importance placed on the ability to communicate with subordinates and peers discussed earlier.

Leadership: The final classification of competencies are shown in Figure 3 and relate to leadership abilities. The primary competencies identified in this area involve creating an environment in which tasks could be performed efficiently, and the reinforcement of subordinates for doing superior work. The rank of these skills remained reasonably constant throughout the industries examined.

The highest ranked of the leadership skills was for the manager to "set examples of optimum performance, attitude, and behavior" followed by creating an environment in which the workers feel

that their contributions are important. Related to these competencies are the abilities to determine the most efficient ways to perform a task and to clearly define the duties and responsibilities of employees. The only two industries whose responses varied widely from the average on these traits were hospitals and distribution related businesses.

Hospitals saw the ability to determine efficient ways to perform tasks as of less importance than the other industries. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the nature of the supervisor-subordinate relationship. Hospital administrators are less concerned with finding efficient ways for employees to do their tasks because job duties are relatively structured as a result of the relationship with the patients. Experimenting with new ways to administer medication and work methods is not

within the scope of most hospital employees.

The ability to clearly define duties and responsibilities was more important in the distribution related industries than in the others studied. This tends to support the previous discussion of the role of management in these firms as being to clearly define duties and then for the subordinates to do as assigned. The ability to clearly communicate instructions was the competency most frequently identified as necessary for managers in this industry.

Implications

Of the competencies identified in this study, communication skills were identified to be the most often needed. The form these skills should take varies with the type of industry. The ability to follow instructions ranked high in all industries studied. The second most important competency overall was for the manager to be able to select the right employee and to give clear instructions.

This ability to exchange information with superiors, subordinates, and peers was important to all of these industries. The highest ranking control skills could also be related to communications. These skills relate to the managers' ability to handle complaints and to tactfully identify and correct mistakes.

The person designing a training program should examine the abilities of the trainees in these areas. The poor communication skills could be the basis for other organizational problems. Trying to develop an advanced training program when such basic skills are lacking will likely be futile.

However, this does not mean that all organizations should initiate a communications training program. In fact, without an appropriate plan to "ease" employees into such a program, it would stand a good chance of failing. Even if people realize that they have a communications problem,

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they are unlikely to try to resolve it by attending a training program. Such people, in fact, are likely to avoid a training program because it is hard for them to communicate with others, yet they would be able to gain the most from such training.

A more likely way to teach communications would be to incorporate these skills into other training programs. An early topic on the training agenda could include the need to clarify instructions from superiors and to stress the importance of verifying that subordinates and peers understand what has been said. Managers often take the position that if the employee does not understand he/she can seek clarification. The trainer might examine why people are hesitant to ask questions. They should also remember that students (or trainees) often are hesitant to ask questions in a training program. Many of these reasons are also reasons why subordinates do not ask questions of their supervisor.

Again, it should be noted that not all industries attach equal importance to particular competencies. Creating a favorable work environment and setting good examples for employees are considered highly important leadership skills for managers in distribution related businesses but relatively unimportant for hospital managers.

Training programs should allow for these differences. Trainers that design one package and attempt to apply it to all situations probably will experience at most moderate success. By assessing the competencies needed by a particular firm in a given industry, an instructional package can be developed which will better satisfy the training needs of the organization.

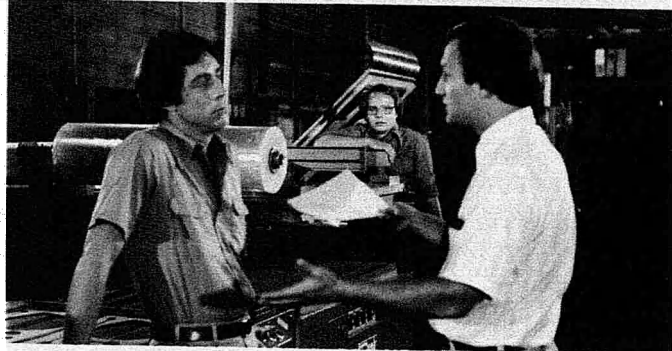
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