

self-directed learning options, and increased learner responsibility for skill acquisition are becoming a reality now. Down the road are opportunities for virtual reality simulations, as well as desktop electronic support systems to augment and support the training process. We also see a need for more peer coaching and support as the manager's time becomes more precious.

As you have seen, the workplace and the people who work in it are constantly changing. So, too, must behavior modeling. With these enhancements to your behavior modeling

process, you can minimize or expand classroom time, provide basic or expanded content, and have a learning process that is both flexible and effective for learners, whether they are senior managers or front line employees. You can also ensure that people are learning processes that they can apply in complex and changing environments and that workers can handle more diverse and dynamic interactions required for success. ■

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Interaction Modeling: A Supervisory Interaction Modeling Training Concept 1976

CAN TRAINING MEASURABLY improve supervisory skills in such areas as increasing productivity, reducing employee absenteeism, handling discrimination complaints, and overcoming resistance to change?

Although many managers would be skeptical, a number of leading companies are attempting to change supervisory behavior in these critical areas as well as others, and there is research today to show the effectiveness of several of the training programs.

These training programs use a new training concept called *interaction modeling*, which is quite different from traditional supervisory training programs. No theory is taught; instead, for each situation, practical steps are provided. Positive models of behavior are presented and on-the-job application is stressed.

Interaction modeling programs differ according to individual needs and objectives of using organizations, but most have the following elements:

- ▶ The subject matter is targeted to *real*

In February 1976, Training and Development Journal unveiled the then bold, new supervisory training concept called interaction modeling—a forerunner of behavior modeling. Here's a condensed version of the original.

BY WILLIAM BYHAM AND JAMES ROBINSON

needs of the group by identifying, prior to training, the difficult human interaction situations confronted by the supervisors to be trained, e.g., improving work habits, utilizing effective disciplinary action, delegating responsibilities, orienting new employees, and so forth.

- ▶ Six supervisors are trained at once.
- ▶ The training is structured so that one difficult human interaction situation is learned at a time.
- ▶ A step-by-step approach for handling each difficult interaction situation is provided.
- ▶ A positive model using the step-by-step approach shows learners how

each difficult situation can be handled.

- ▶ Practice in handling the difficult situations is provided each learner.
- ▶ Confidence is developed as supervisors discover they are developing skills to handle difficult situations which previously they had not been able to handle effectively.
- ▶ A receptive and supportive on-the-job environment is built so that the trained supervisors do in fact use their skills on the job.

Learning by mistakes

In spite of its popularity, there are a number of reasons why allowing

supervisors to learn by trial and error is not cost-effective and often does not work.

- Supervisors do not recognize mistakes in dealing with individuals. Negative results of supervisory behavior such as turnover or poor attitude often are so separated from the supervisory actions that bring them about that the supervisor does not connect them and learning does not occur.

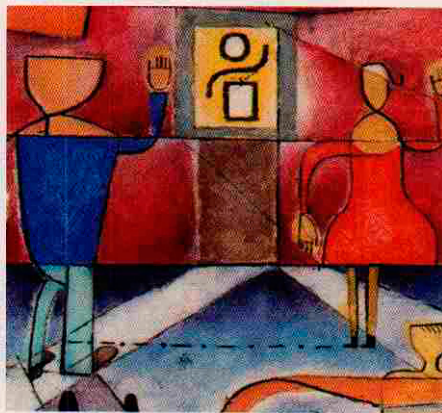
- It may take a supervisor a long time to chance upon an appropriate way of handling a difficult interaction situation. Managers would never set a new operator in front of a machine and say "try different methods of operating this machine until you find one that works." Yet that is what happens to many supervisors taking over a new job.

- Failure experiences, which result from "learning by mistakes," lessen a supervisor's self-esteem and confidence. Floundering on the job, experiencing frustration, and lack of achievement erode a supervisor's confidence and result in reluctance to handle situations until they reach crisis proportions. Crisis management substitutes for effective and consistent supervision. Achievement motivation is lessened through a lack of accomplishment.

- Skills training is a better method. A better training method has been known and applied for years in nonmanagement skill training. The job of running a machine would never be assigned without first providing the learner with step-by-step directions and without showing the learner how to perform each step. If the directions and demonstrations are adequate, the learner makes few initial errors. Usually, he or she starts by running the machine slowly but correctly. Speed, confidence, and satisfaction increase with practice. Unfortunately, until interaction modeling, these same concepts were seldom used in the training of supervisors.

Building skills

To illustrate how an interaction modeling training program works, we will use as an example the Interaction Management training system, which is the most widely used supervisory modeling program in business and industry. Although Interaction Management contains elements common to



all interaction modeling programs, it has some unique elements not found in other programs.

The Interaction Management system consists of 20 skill modules, each dealing with a specific, difficult interaction situation faced by supervisors. An organization can choose any number of these modules to design a training program to meet the specific needs of its supervisors. In addition to skill modules, a program is made up of:

- An introductory module, providing an overview of the entire program and explaining the concepts that thread through all the modules.

- Review modules in which participants discuss their on-the-job use of skills acquired in training. The opportunity for additional practice in handling difficult on-the-job situations is also afforded.

- A diagnosis and review module is designed to help participants correctly diagnose critical situations and choose the most appropriate skills for each situation. It also provides participants with an opportunity to plan on-the-job applications.

A separate, but integrated, part of the system is a one-and-one-half day training workshop for the managers of the supervisors being trained.

Supervisory skills are successfully learned in an Interaction Management program because the supervisor sees immediate application of the skills being learned. The elements that make up the skill are clearly defined, a model is provided, and practice in using the elements is provided.

A key ingredient in any learning situation is a motivated learner. This is accomplished in an Interaction Management program by focusing on the

actual needs of the supervisors and by providing them a sense of "ownership" in the program. Before the Interaction Management modules to be used in the program are determined, a needs analysis questionnaire is used to gather information about what employee situations are causing difficulty for the supervisors to be trained.

The needs-analysis information makes possible the construction of an effective training program aimed specifically at the supervisors' needs. The supervisors know it is a tailored program, developed to help them. They see it as relevant to their problem situations and their success on the job. They have a sense of ownership and enter the program with the expectation of benefiting.

The critical steps provide a sequence of events to be followed during an interaction between a supervisor and a subordinate. The steps provide an organized way of handling employee interactions while still appreciating the differences in the subordinates with which supervisors must deal. The critical steps are a fundamental part of each interaction modeling module and provide a structure for an effective human interaction.

Providing directions on how to accomplish a task is a central part of all learning theories but it is absent from most supervisory and management training programs. Traditionally, trainers have said that there is no "one right way" to deal with people and because of this, most training programs have provided no real direction. Interaction modeling programs recognize that while there may be many ways of handling a situation, a supervisor needs one way that works. The fact that there may be more ways is not important.

Following the steps in order is stressed so supervisors do not skip over steps such as "ask the employee's help in solving the problem" in their haste to define action steps. But varying the amount of time devoted to each step is encouraged in the individuals with whom the supervisors interact. Thus, while Interaction Management provides an ordered, systematic approach, it still takes full cognizance of individual differences.

While the critical steps indicate the type of information to be covered during an interaction, a film or video-

tape model shows the supervisors how to handle the situation. In the film, a supervisor successfully deals with the type of interaction situation being studied in that specific module.

Observation of models

Most human learning comes from observations of models. This is especially true with adult learning of supervisory skills. Most of a supervisor's methods of dealing with subordinates can be traced to past experiences with previous supervisors. Yet again, few traditional training programs have systematically provided positive models to guide supervisory learning in the classroom.

In an effective modeling firm, the people in the firm, the setting, and the situation must seem real to be effective. Supervisors must be able to say to themselves that "people like me can handle these situations...the critical steps do work!" Learning and confidence are provided.

Internalization of the skills needed to handle the interpersonal situations is achieved when the participants practice handling different variations of the interaction situation in a series of skill practice exercises. In a skill module, each participant gets to practice handling one interaction situation as a supervisor, and gets to see the situation from the point of view of an employee by being the subordinate in another situation. In addition, each supervisor actively observes, takes notes, and discusses four other skill-practice exercises.

Skill-practice exercises are significantly different from the role-plays often used in supervisory training programs. Too often role-playing is used to give a number of negative illustrations of how a situation can be handled. With no clear road map or model to follow, most role-players do poorly and receive negative reinforcement (known as a critique or constructive criticism). An individual going through such a program learns how difficult such situations are to handle (witness all the mistakes), and learns that there are a number of ways a situation can be handled (but apparently no right or generally effective way).

Sometimes chance produces a positive model in terms of a role-play situation, and all participants agree

■ *The principal way that confidence is built is through reinforcement* ■

they have learned a lot, but most of the time this does not happen. Skill-practice exercises in the Interaction Management system are not intended to be a model...instead they are practice exercises designed to build skill and confidence based on the already presented critical steps and model.

The situation most participants face in traditional role-playing situations is similar to a person who knows the theory of how a car operates, but who has had step-by-step training and has never seen a person drive a car. Many false starts and potentially dangerous situations will occur if this person attempts to drive a car. A participant in a skill-practice exercise is like a person who knows what to do and when to do it, has watched a car being successfully driven, and is ready to develop driving skills through a series of coordinated and well-planned practice sessions behind the wheel of a car.

Confidence building

Confidence building is important to the success of any supervisory training program, for without it skill acquisition is useless. The supervisor, confident in the skills acquired in training, will apply the skills on the job. When the supervisor knows that he or she can handle the situation, he or she will face up to a work-habit problem when it first arises, which is when it is most easily fixable.

Traditional supervisory training programs do not build confidence. In fact, the impact on confidence is often negative. At the end of many supervisory training programs, the participants feel that handling interpersonal situations is much more complicated than they thought. They have had many negative behaviors pointed out to them but have been given few examples of how problems can be handled successfully. Participants are often confused by various methodologies and theories about people and problems. They wonder to themselves what Hertzberg would do here or what Likert would do there?

Their increased knowledge of human motivation and behavior is not transferable to the skills necessary to successfully handle their problems.

Interaction Management programs stress confidence building. The positive model which is an integral part of all interaction modeling programs, graphically shows the supervisors that specific, difficult employee situations can be handled satisfactorily from the supervisor's point of view *and* from the subordinate's point of view. The critical steps provide a road map and give the supervisor confidence that if the critical steps are followed, a successful conclusion will result. The emphasis in the skill practice exercises is that the discussion with the employee will be effective if the supervisors follow the critical steps.

The principal way that confidence is built is through positive reinforcement. Throughout an Interaction Management program, the accent is on the positive. A participant may start out very insecure and hesitant, even to the point of being afraid to enter into a skill-practice exercise. However, with each skill-practice being positively reinforced by the classroom administrator and his or her peers, and with the participant gaining insight from watching successful peer behavior, the participant learns to handle difficult situations and solve problems.

The first three skill-practice exercises in each module are provided the participants in their workbooks. In order to assure an early successful experience, the first skill-practice exercise in each module is designed to be quite similar to the situation in the modeling film. This enables the first supervisor in each skill module to have a successful experience in handling this type of situation. Each subsequent exercise becomes more difficult and more different from the modeling film. However, because each skill-practice is a learning experience for the observers, these supervisors are able to handle increasingly difficult situations.

After these first three skill-practice exercises, the supervisors describe their own on-the-job situations and then handle these in skill-practice exercises. Using forms provided in their workbooks, the participants describe the history leading up to the situation, what the supervisor would like to ac-

comply, and the anticipated response of the subordinate. The classroom administrator also schedules these self-generated situations in order of increasing difficulty. Now the supervisors are learning to handle their own difficult employee situations through a series of successes, not failures.

The review modules, which are scheduled after every three or four skill modules, build confidence. They provide a nonthreatening situation where participants can review experiences that have occurred when applying the interaction modeling skills on the job. If the interaction skills learned did not work in handling an on-the-job situation, these can be tried again in a skill-practice session to find out why the newly learned skills did not work. Also, the skill-practice sessions can provide alternative methods of confronting the situation. The supervisors can gain confidence by handling a situation in the classroom before applying it in real life. This rehearsal often provides just the extra measure of confidence needed to confront a particularly difficult on-the-job problem.

The very last thing that happens in each Interaction Management skill module is that the administrator passes out "Critical Steps Cards," which are laminated plastic cards containing the critical steps for that module. It is suggested that participants have the cards available during interactions so they won't have to worry about forgetting the steps. The cards act as a "security blanket."

Transfer of training

The importance of a receptive on-the-job environment in which a supervisor can try out skills learned in training has been well documented through the years. In the classic study done at the International Harvester Co., it was found that training actually produced a negative effect on the performance of supervisors when they returned from the training to a real life situation where their bosses held values counter to the values taught in the training program. Thus, an important consideration in the Interaction Management system is creating a receptive and a positively reinforcing environment.

In the Interaction Management program, managers of the supervisors be-

ing trained attend a one-and-one-half day workshop (or three half-days) in which the following takes place:

- ▶ They view a film which defines the purpose of the program, provides examples of the three basic human interaction concepts that underlie all the programs, and shows how a typical skill module is conducted.

- ▶ They take part in some of the same skill-building modules in which their subordinate supervisors are being trained.

- ▶ They have the opportunity to handle in skill-practice exercises, many of the same situations that the supervisors also handle.

- ▶ They are trained in how to work with their subordinate supervisors in diagnosing supervisory problems, in determining the most appropriate interaction skills to use, and in gaining agreements on the desired outcome of the problem situations. For example, managers are taught how to help supervisors define the specific causes of a problem and outline specific interaction goals prior to deciding on the substance of the actual employee discussion. Difference in work-habit problems and job-performance are particularly stressed as confusion between the two often results in ineffective discussions with employees.

- ▶ Managers are taught how to effectively reinforce their subordinate supervisors' use of the Interaction Management skills on the job.

- ▶ Managers also consider their impact as "managerial models" upon their subordinate supervisors, and are taught to be "positive models" of effective supervisory behavior.

The Management Reinforcement Workshop uses an interaction modeling design in the training of managers. They learn diagnostic and reinforcement skills through the use of critical steps, modeling films, skill practice, and immediate feedback.

The Interaction Management system itself has been designed to facilitate the transfer of the learned skills to actual use on the job. Transfer to the job is accomplished in the following ways:

- ▶ The modules used in a program are related to specific needs of participants so supervisors are taught skills they will have the opportunity to apply immediately.

- ▶ Each participant is asked to develop a skill-practice situation based upon a current on-the-job problem. These situations are used in the classroom to give participants the opportunity to practice dealing with situations they are facing on the job.

- ▶ At the end of each module, participants are asked to describe a situation where they can apply the interaction skill on the job. This increases the participant's commitment to a trial application. The commitment can be followed up later by the trainer or management if extra reinforcement and encouragement are beneficial.

- ▶ Review modules are held periodically during the program. In these review modules, the participants discuss problems encountered in applying the skills to on-the-job situations. Further practice is also provided so participants have opportunities to increase skill proficiency in areas of their greatest concern.

- ▶ The final module in a program is designed to aid the supervisor on diagnosing specific employee situations and selecting the appropriate interaction skill to use in each situation. Here again, the idea is to help the supervisor know where and when to apply various skills learned in the modules.

"Promising" future

Many supervisory training programs have shown great promise, have gained wide public acceptance for a time, and then have been forgotten. Will interaction modeling programs follow the same route?

We think not, for two reasons. First, early research has shown that the program is effective. The "death toll" for many training programs was their inability to prove their contribution through research. From the research that has already been conducted and research that is under way, it appears organizations using interaction modeling programs will be able to show that their programs are making meaningful contributions that can pay off in better employee relations and cost savings. Second, interaction modeling is a learning process, not a theory being taught. This is an important distinction which makes interaction modeling more adaptable than specific theories which have come and gone in the training area. ■