

## What kind of management development improves productivity?

In this bimonthly column, four experts offer their solutions to a common problem faced by human resource developers. This month, four high-level internal practitioners with heavy management development responsibility (and more than 60 years of HRD experience among them) were asked to address the problem of tying management development to productivity improvement.

A point on which most everyone seems to concur today is that the management function is critical in creating and implementing the broad strategies and specific procedures organizations need to improve productivity. The place where opinions begin to diverge dramatically is in the nature of the training and development programs that can best equip managers to accomplish this important work.

One school of thought champions a broad, humanistic approach to management development, a strategic rather than tactical approach. Programs based on this approach cover an enormous range. There are the familiar people-skills training sessions touching on communications, leadership, motivation and a host of other "soft" management areas. These programs imply—and sometimes argue explicitly—that managers trained in interpersonal skills can elicit the best performance from technical personnel and work most effectively with other organizational units, thus improving productivity.

At the far end of the humanistic management development spectrum are the extended, usually off-site programs that school managers in an eclectic combination of humanities and behavioral sciences, the goal being managers who regard the resources at their disposal, as well as internal and external forces, as interconnected, interdependent systems. These programs aim to strengthen managers' conceptual skills, especially

their ability to see the long-term implications of policies and actions rather than focusing exclusively on short-term profitability (a U.S. standard that some say is obsolete and ultimately weakening the nation's competitive posture). Even these "far-out" management development programs are, in other words, based on productivity improvement strategies.

Another approach to developing managers who improve productivity—one that is gaining advocates rapidly, as evidenced by the comments of our contributors—calls for turning away from "soft" management education to more technical management training, training in hard-nosed productivity skills that can effect training's ROI and the organization's bottom line more obviously and more quickly. A strong proponent of this strategy is Metropolitan Life's William S. Mitchell.

### "It's time for a change in management training!"

*William S. Mitchell is a director in human resources at the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York, N.Y. For 10 years he was in charge of their management development function.*

A good deal of our national energy is expended in anticipating and countering cyclical trends—in economics, in the

weather, even in human behavior.

There seems to be a cycle in motion in the management process as well, concentrating first on "scientific" management (Taylor), then attention to employees (the Hawthorne studies), employee needs (Maslow), job satisfaction (Herzberg) and, now, productivity. If the last is the current management kick, then we may have come full circle and returned to an emphasis on applying technical management skills to get more, and better, measurable results out the door at the least possible cost.

Because management training is expected to mirror needs, it may be time to build productivity improvement training into our curricula before the next stage in the cycle leaves us in the unfortunate (but familiar) position of being well prepared for yesterday.

No doubt a chorus of disagreement will swear that contemporary management training is chock full of productivity training. I disagree.

Interpersonal skills, counseling, communications and the like, while certainly necessary for most managers, are only supportive processes to the main axis of technical effort to achieve better quality and more cost-effective outputs for the resources used.

If one reviews the content of many large corporations' management training programs, it is rare to find heavy skill-building in such areas as work-level forecasting; work scheduling; resource scheduling and allocation; resource quality improvement; work simplification; methods improvement; organization structuring; output monitoring and productivity control; and cost analysis, interpretation and control.

While some programs mention these subjects briefly, cover them lightly in sessions on planning or control, or treat them in generic problem-solving sessions, how many build skill levels that can be applied in detail back on the job? A more important question may be, "Are programs teaching skills in the management processes we need in this economic climate?"

These subjects used to be common program ingredients, but it has been nearly a generation since they lost their prominence in management curricula to a long list of subjects from the behavioral sciences. There is an implied lack of importance in the omission of heavy attention to technical productivity improvement skills. Perhaps curricula have been built on the assumption that people who become managers already know enough

about technical aspects of productivity improvement. Have 20 years of mediocre national productivity validated this assumption?

If we are going to expect managers to improve productivity, we should give them the technical skills to get control of their organizations, and refocus our training and reward systems to support that effort. This does not mean abandoning the teaching of behavioral science-driven management skills, but placing them in proper perspective and weighting curriculum toward the kind of process we now need managed (just as we did on another sweep of the cycle when human relations needed emphasis).

Reintroducing these technical management skills would involve much more than dusting off 30-year-old teaching outlines. These subjects would have to be reinterpreted and rebuilt in light of the technological advances and successful applications of productivity improvement techniques that have appeared over this time.

While this is easy to recommend, it may be hard to bring about, for there seems to be a scarcity of expertise to teach the applied skills of productivity improvement methods at the middle manager level. With a generation of neglect, it is little wonder that the management training field seems so thin in this area.

But we can have faith, because if this notion of curriculum change catches on, we will quickly see a number of consulting firms announce programs to fill the bill.

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### **The recommendations:**

1. Build heavy technical productivity improvement skill-building into management training.
2. Don't abandon the teaching of behavioral science-driven management skills, but place them in proper perspective and weight the curriculum toward the kind of management we need now.
3. Refocus reward systems to support that effort.
4. Return for guidance and inspiration to the management training used before the behavioral sciences approach came into vogue. But reinterpret and remodel the old subjects in light of advances in instructional technology and, of course, in work systems themselves.

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### **"Management education should act as a tool for communicating corporate values."**

*David A. Groff is manager of management education for Corning Glass Works, Corning, N.Y.*

An elaborate orientation program is the newly hired manager's first exposure to Corning's very active and productivity-minded management education system. Well designed, thorough orientation is an important measure we've taken to reduce the attrition of new managers during their first five years at Corning. The program teaches how we do things here: what our products are, how managers are evaluated, how we set our objectives, how people get promoted.

Another stage in the orientation process is the rapid education we provide to managers beginning work at an unfamiliar manufacturing site. Rather than allowing them to educate themselves intuitively, we second guess the gaps in their knowledge and provide them with a list of the questions they will have. We cause them to ask the right questions; they are responsible for finding the people with the right answers.

These orientation measures are important to productivity because they get new managers up to speed quickly and efficiently. They reduce attrition because new managers learn the basics of corporate procedures and values very quickly, thus increasing their chances of early success and satisfaction. We spend less time and money in retraining.

To contribute optimally to productivity, management development should be continual, and it should always represent the corporate position in some way as it transfers knowledge and skills. Our programs for managers in the first 10 years or so of their career focus almost exclusively on the domestic corporate environment—again, how we do it at Corning, whether it's manufacturing, marketing or accounting.

As the manager becomes more senior the development sequence becomes much more externally oriented, an examination of the international environment in which the corporation operates. The training also becomes more multifunctional; the marketing manager learns about manufacturing and research and development.

Management education should act to

clarify top management's directions. This is one of the most important ways it can contribute to productivity. Policy statements from the top can be very abstract and not easily translated into implementation. Management education can work to make these directions communicable at the operator level. After the directions are clarified, consensus can be gained and methods and tools identified to support the position.

Management education should always act as a tool for communicating corporate values; it should reflect the corporate culture, environment and positions. Many organizations' management development efforts are not particularly relevant to the inherent workings of the organization. We try very hard to maintain a close match between management education and what Corning stands for, to be very sensitive to our internal environment. This links management development to productivity. To allow management education to reflect the values of a consultant or a university is counterproductive.

The trend toward competency-based management education (espoused by McBer and Company and others) is appropriate. This approach identifies the characteristics of managers that will be compatible with the values of an organization, and works to develop them in all the managers.

Corning currently offers about 80 regularly scheduled management development programs offered multiple times throughout the year and between 20 and 40 additional programs scheduled one to five times annually. The majority are in "hard" management skills—marketing, pricing, engineering, statistics, accounting—although there are "soft" components in most of these. Every sales training course addresses motivation, for example.

We're just beginning to surface an increased interest in some of the "softer" areas such as communications, interpersonal skills and presentation skills. These are more difficult to measure and to teach. The "softer" management skills require people to modify their attitudes, their social and psychological styles. Often how-to training appears more successful because it's easier to get people to improve their knowledge or skills than it is for them to change their attitudes.

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### **The recommendations:**

1. A thorough, well-designed orientation system gets managers up to speed quickly



and helps ensure their longevity with the organization.

2. Management education should be continual and developmental. It should always represent a corporate position, as it moves from transferring internal knowledge and skills toward exposing senior managers to the corporation's external environment.

3. Management education should act to clarify top management's directions.

4. Education should be a tool to communicate corporate values. Middle management education can work as a conduit between top management and operational levels.

**"Customized management training gives us the biggest bang for our buck."**

*Georgia Eckelman is manager of management development for the western division of Anheuser-Busch, St. Louis, Mo.*

Anheuser-Busch is vitally interested in productivity improvement, so much so that an entire productivity improvement department was recently created. That department concentrates on technical training and is extremely bottom line-oriented. Until recently, our management development and training function did not concentrate on deliberately, specifically linking management development to productivity improvement. We're only now on the brink of implementing stronger ties between management development and productivity improvement: with stronger evaluation efforts tied more closely to productivity; harder training contracts; more skill-specific development as opposed to generic management training.

Between 30 and 40 percent of our work is done through our "catalog" seminars, canned seminars that we develop in-house, strictly for in-house use. We offer about 35 seminars every year at a central facility. They cover basic management skills such as coaching, time management, stress management, leadership and writing skills for managers. While the sessions are fairly generic and theory-based (covering situational leadership and theories of motivation, for example), they are heavy in company-specific applications, in real-work simula-

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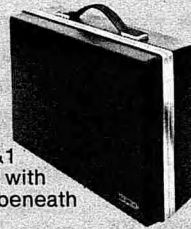
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tions and role plays.

Right now we are working in two ways to tie these catalog seminars more closely to productivity improvement. We are developing harder, more bottom line-oriented evaluation methods. How much did our management seminar on motivation influence absenteeism? Do these centralized, "y'all come" programs give managers the skills they need to improve productivity back at the brewery?

In addition to developing more rigorous evaluation, we are currently working on a radical revision of the catalog seminars. Based on a massive data collection effort concerning how management needs are perceived at all levels of the organization, we are narrowing the breadth of our generic courses. We plan to start offering shorter but more in-depth courses, on fewer topics. They will be oriented even more toward skill development rather than theory, with lots of developmental role plays and practice drills in, for example, interviewing and motivation.

One challenge we have at Anheuser-Busch is the need to balance consistent, company-wide management training with the specific needs of our various plants. We have been quite successful in delivering customized management training, provided by request of the plant's top manager and based on a needs analysis we perform.

Customized management training gives us the biggest bang for our buck. We make a very specific contract with the top manager. We work with the plant's managers as an intact work group, and because the training is so specific to needs, we see very good results.

I'm not convinced that more training in technical productivity management is what managers need to improve productivity. One of the biggest payoffs our department has experienced came from a labor relations course created by two of our people. They developed a model for the grievance procedure itself—something for which our managers had a crying need—and they created specific intervention steps. They developed a training program that labor relations managers can conduct themselves. This effort has produced an excellent return on investment for the organization, and it certainly focused on people skills and issues, not on the product.

### The recommendations:

1. Narrow the breadth of the management development curriculum. Focus on

fewer topics in more depth, and take a skill-building approach.

2. Tie generic skill development to organization-specific productivity issues and situations. Use developmental simulations and role plays.

3. Place plenty of energy in customized management development for branch offices or plants. Concentrating on the needs of managers in their intact work teams can yield high productivity improvement results.

4. Keep your eyes and ears open constantly; continually collect data on your managers' current developmental needs. Constantly adjust your "canned" programs so that you are developing managers to meet timely challenges.

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**"Good managers get to be that way because they have a set of experiences that have taught them to work through the system."**

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*Mike Walsh is director of personnel at ContiCommodity Services, Inc., a subsidiary of Continental Grain Company in Chicago, Ill. Continental Grain Company is a major international futures brokerage firm with 36 offices in the United States, Canada, England, Germany, the Netherlands and South America.*

At ContiCommodity, management development is tied to productivity improvement in a very specific way: by placing line managers and professionals with management potential on productivity improvement task forces.

This approach benefits the organization twice: by helping to solve its productivity problems and by developing its managers in several ways. It gives the individual manager the chance to develop internal consulting skills, analytical skills and oral and written presentation skills. It tests and develops a manager's teamwork and team leadership skills, which are critical to an individual's evolving managerial style. And it helps identify managers' and professionals' potential; it gives them a chance to impress top management.

The task force approach carries several assumptions. If the goal is to equip someone to become a general manager, cross-skill development is required. The task

force experience trains managers across organizational areas without actually assigning them to work in those areas. Another assumption is that management development is a process that takes place on the job, not something that begins and ends in a seminar or executive development program. Experience develops managers, and the task force is a safe environment for gaining experience.

By using managers to solve productivity problems, there's a far better chance that they will buy into solutions. As team members present their work to management, they and their work become part of that group. The experience gives managers and potential managers the chance to project a positive, competent image to their peers, an important part of being accepted as a manager.

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### The recommendations:

1. Avoid the arbitrary imposition of an outside "productivity consultant." It may yield quick results, but it doesn't contribute to management development; in fact, it teaches managers not to manage.

2. Use teams of managers and professionals to identify and develop recommendations. This gives them the "live" experience they need to develop and test critical management skills.

3. Structure the teams so that they do not have intimate knowledge of the productivity problem they are assigned to solve. This lessens the potential for "vested interest" stances and assures cross-skill development.

4. Any productivity improvement or income optimization effort should force a process that works through the system. Good managers get to be that way because they have had a set of experiences that have taught them to work through the system. They have been allowed to test, correct, improve and build skills and relationships in a real organization. If a managerial candidate is placed in a position of responsibility without such experience, that manager has been done a great disfavor.

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*The topic of the next Four by Four column is training's role in the design of computerized and automated work systems. It will appear in the March issue. Four by Four is edited by Elizabeth Lean.*