

PROFESSIONAL LITERATURE: WHO READS IT?

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In spite of all the talk about the importance of professional literature to the training manager, little is known about the extent to which reading professional literature is an integral part of the day-to-day activity of training managers. Professional literature is highly touted as an important vehicle both for professional growth and as material used in training activities.

But is the training manager reading? Is he or she using the literature in his or her work? And what publications/materials are used most frequently?

In order to answer these questions, two organizations — the American Management Association and the American Society for Training and Development — cooperatively developed a *Reading Habits Questionnaire* and sent it to 3,000 training and development professionals: 1,500 randomly selected from the AMA membership and 1,500 randomly selected from the ASTD membership. The 801 responses — the basis of this article — represented a 31 per cent return rate.

The survey focused on two con-

cerns: what are the reading habits of training managers and what type of professional literature is being read and used by training managers.

One of the important aspects of this study was the cooperative sponsorship of AMA and ASTD. The topic of cooperative ventures among organizations is an important one, but one we cannot discuss in detail here. However, it should be noted that when organizations can overlap their activities in areas of mutual interests and needed services, the benefits can be considerable and can provide a great many benefits for all concerned.

Survey Population

While we consider the information supplied by the 801 respondents to be of great value, the results should be viewed as representing only this population of 801 training professionals. We do not know the extent to which this group of 801 people is representative of the training population as a whole. It is possible that only people who are particularly interested

in reading professional literature answered the questionnaire. Others, not so interested in reading, may not have responded to the survey. But any conclusion that this group of 801 respondents either is or is not representative of the training community is pure speculation. The most sensible way to use the data from this survey is to accept the data as a partial picture and accept it as an improvement over no picture at all.

As might be expected, most (78 per cent) training managers in this survey work in organizations of 500 or more employees. This survey did not determine the extent to which training and development was their sole responsibility. One might imagine that the training function in small organizations is only one of many corporate responsibilities — and may not be the primary responsibility. We can surmise that in large organizations, the training responsibility is distributed among many professionals. At any rate, almost one-third (32 per cent) of the survey population work in organizations of more than 5,000 employees; almost

one-third (32 per cent) work in organizations of 1,000-4,999 employees and about one-third (34 per cent) work in organizations smaller than 1,000 employees.

Approximately half the respondents (48 per cent) are under age 40; 30-34 years of age is the largest

age group. See Exhibit 1 for age distribution.

More than half (66 per cent) are either pursuing graduate studies or hold graduate degrees, which is an impressive statistical finding in itself. As for the rest, two per cent are high-school graduates, 12 per

cent have had some college work and 20 per cent are college graduates (see Exhibit 1).

Most respondents' organizations are located in the northeast and north central areas of the country (58 per cent). The survey population is evenly distributed in locations throughout the rest of the United States and international sites.

Exhibit 3 shows the type of organization represented by the survey population. The preponderance of people work in manufacturing/industrial organizations and in finance/real estate/insurance organizations.

Reading Habits

According to the responses to this survey, training managers spend about as much time reading work-related materials at home as they do at work (see Exhibit 4). Note that the question referred to "work-related" materials. When you consider that most people read at least one newspaper daily and probably do additional leisure reading daily, the time devoted to professional materials seems a considerable part of a training person's daily life.

When asked how effective reading is as a way to keep abreast of developments in the field, 52 per cent of the respondents felt it was very effective; 35 per cent said somewhat effective; 12 per cent, moderately effective; and one per cent did not answer the question. None felt that reading was not effective.

It appears from the above that professional literature is very rewarding to the respondents of this survey. It also suggests that the principles and the ideas being presented in professional training literature are probably having considerable impact on the profession.

How the literature compares in influence to, say, educational programs would be an interesting topic to pursue.

The survey explored some further details of reading habits of the 801 respondents. The question-

EXHIBIT 1.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY AGE

Percentile

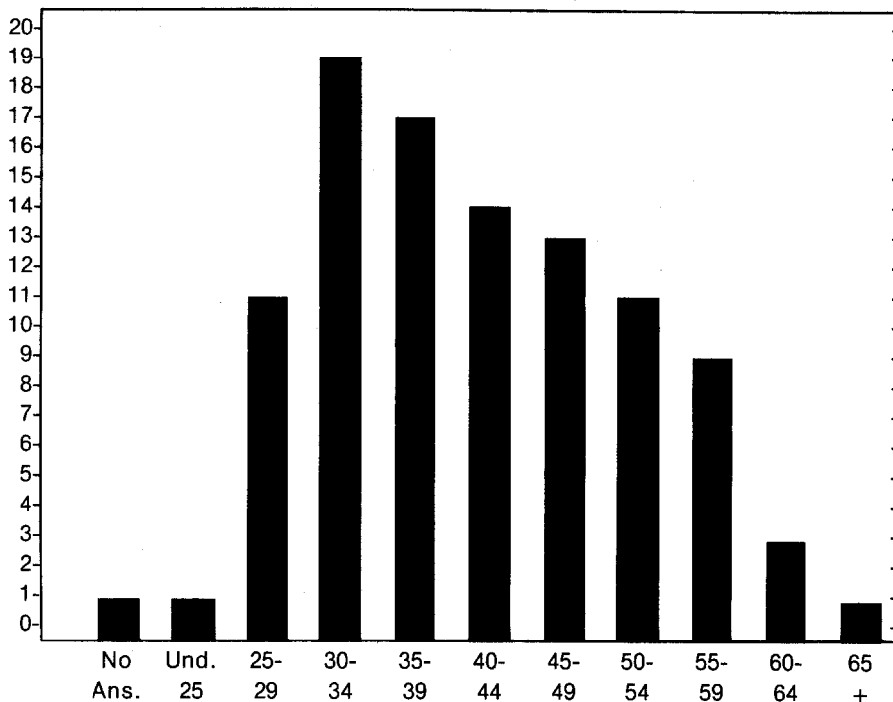


EXHIBIT 2.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

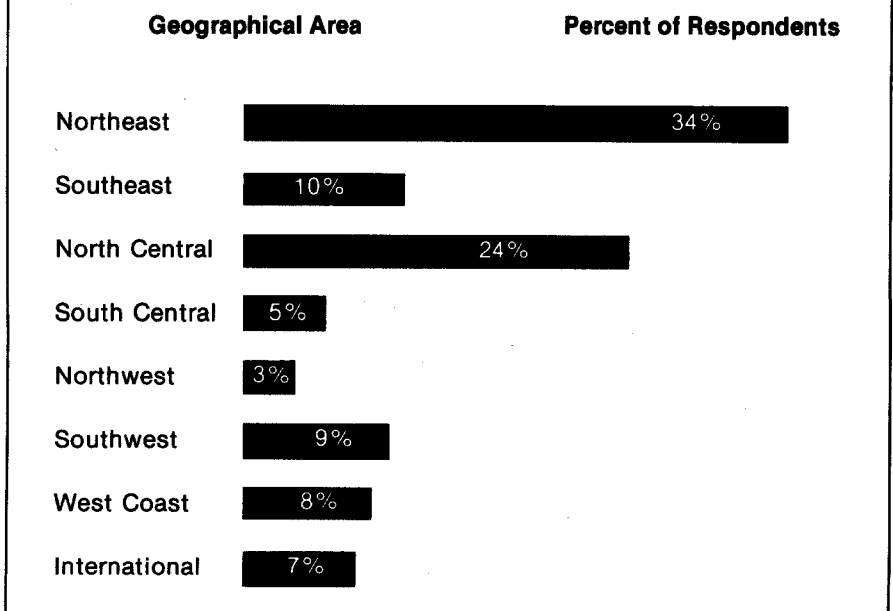


EXHIBIT 3.

DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION

Manuf./Industrial	21%	Business Service/Consulting	4%
Finance/Real Estate/Ins.	15%	Transportation	3%
Manuf./Consumer	9%	Merchandising	3%
Educational/Nonprofit	8%	Communications	2%
Health Services	6%	Professional Society/ Trade Association	2%
State/Local Government	6%	Military	1%
Utilities	5%	Other	11%
Federal Government	4%		

EXHIBIT 4.

TIME SPENT READING WORK-RELATED BOOKS OR PERIODICALS

Hours Per Week At Work	Percentage of Respondents	Hours Per Week At Home	Percentage of Respondents
1-2	32%	1-2	31%
3-5	44%	3-5	32%
6-10	15%	6-10	14%
Over 10	5%	Over 10	6%
No Answer	4%	No Answer	16%

EXHIBIT 5.

PROFESSIONAL BOOKS AND PERIODICALS READ EACH MONTH

Number of Books	Percentage of Respondents (Read Seriously)	Percentage of Respondents (Browse Through)
0	17%	4%
1-2	60%	35%
3-4	12%	32%
5-9	3%	11%
10 or more	-	5%
No Answer	8%	13%

Number of Books	Percentage of Respondents (Read Seriously)	Percentage of Respondents (Browse Through)
0	4%	3%
1-2	42%	28%
3-4	36%	28%
5-9	11%	19%
10 or more	3%	10%
No Answer	4%	12%

naire asked questions that differentiated reading books from reading periodicals and distinguished "reading seriously" from "browsing through." Exhibit 5 shows the respondents' replies.

The bulk of the respondents are reading one to four periodicals and one to four books rather thoroughly each month. In addition, most of these same people are browsing through one to nine additional books and one to nine additional periodicals each month.

The next item of interest, of course, is *what* books and periodicals training managers are reading. Or, put another way, what publications make up the corpus of "professional literature" in the opinion of this group of training managers. Since the questionnaire did not ask managers to name the publications they are reading, we can only assume that their responses to a different question might also be the clue to the identity of their own personal reading selections.

The survey asked whether there is a basic group of books and periodicals with which every professional training person should be familiar. Fifty-three per cent said yes, there is a group of books and 59 per cent said yes, there is a group of periodicals. Those who believe there is a core of basic literature then suggested which publications make up that core. The lists below are in order of frequency mentioned and do not include publications mentioned by fewer than five per cent of the respondents. . . .

BOOKS IMPORTANT TO TRAINING PROFESSIONALS

Publications of Robert F. Mager
Books published by ASTD

Publications of Peter F. Drucker

Books published by AMACOM

Publications of George S. Odiorne

Publications of Douglas McGregor

Publications of Addison-Wesley

Books of Malcolm S. Knowles

Books of Frederick Herzberg

PERIODICALS IMPORTANT TO TRAINING PROFESSIONALS

ASTD's *Training and Development Journal*/National Report newsletter

Training

AMACOM Periodicals

Individual titles most often mentioned were *ASTD Training and Development Handbook*, *Preparing Instructional Objectives* by Mager, *Analyzing Performance Problems* by Mager, and *Human Side of Enterprise* by McGregor.

About a third of the survey respondents suggested omissions in the literature. The topics mentioned cover too wide a range to be listed here, but the primary interest was in techniques that would help the training manager in his daily tasks. Needs for more material on the theoretical bases to the training and development profession were seldom mentioned.

Some respondents felt that the amount of literature is excessive and that people don't have the time to read what they have. Their concern was not about omissions in the literature but for the need of people to be more active in reading the literature currently available.

Summary

The cooperative venture of this *Reading Habits Survey* by the American Management Association and American Society for Training and Development was an important step to increasing our knowledge about the significance of professional literature to the training manager. This group of 801 respondents is made up of rather active readers and they are reading a selection of publications that are very familiar to the training professional world.

It is rather obvious from this survey that professional literature plays a highly significant role in the work of training and development. Now that the importance of professional literature is becoming more clear, the further, and perhaps critical question is how the knowledge gained from the literature is impacting training and development work. What difference does all this reading make in the effectiveness and quality of the day-to-day work of the training manager? This should be our next concern.

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