

ASSIMILATING THE NEWLY-EMPLOYED HARD-CORE

*with particular emphasis
on the first-line supervisor
and the JOBS program*

Virtually all of today's major manpower programs are aimed at the "hard-core unemployed" or the "disadvantaged." These are the hundreds of thousands of Americans who have spent all or nearly all of their lives outside of the mainstream of our country's economy and culture. Of the programs designed to train and find jobs for these people none has been as successful as the one entitled: "Job Opportunities in the Business Sector" (JOBS). One of the keys to the success of the JOBS program is that, in addition to training the disadvantaged, it also provides for various supportive services (e.g., remedial education, medical services, supervisory training and so on) which are designed to facilitate the assimilation of the hard-core and to make them permanent and productive members of the labor force. Those individuals in charge of the JOBS program strongly recommend one supportive service in particular: the training of supervisors and other regular members of the organization who will work with the disadvantaged.¹ It is generally recognized that the foreman or first-line supervisor is a key figure in attempts to develop and utilize these people.

THE PROBLEMS

The immediate supervisor of the newly-employed hard-core often finds himself in a very difficult position. As the NAM says:

"He finds he must spend an inordinate amount of time, as he sees it, instructing [the disadvantaged] in the simplest work procedures. Even with this extra attention, their production is low and their rate of errors is high. They are often late to work. They are often absent without calling in. Their wages are frequently garnisheed. Furthermore, many of the regular employees resent these people and are not reluctant to cause them trouble when the opportunity arises."²

On top of all this, 70 to 80 percent of the trainees are black,³ and authorities agree that, as a group, foremen and other first-line supervisors are certainly as prejudiced against minority group members as anyone else — probably more so.

In a sense, one could say that the disadvantaged are extraordinary people (i.e., extra-ordinary) who present extraordinary problems to the organization. Some of their extraordinary characteristics and the resultant problems are shown in Table I. Looking at the "Resultant Problems" column, it is very easy to become pessimistic about the chances for the long-range success of the JOBS program or any other manpower program aimed at training and employing the hard-core. Yet, according to nearly all reports the extraordinary problems that accompany the influx of the disadvantaged into the workplace are being solved. One frequently hears that the disadvantaged are being assimilated smoothly, that their absenteeism and turnover rates are not much higher than anyone else's, and that they can meet the normal standards for quantity and quality of production.⁴ While there is near-unanimity among employers on what the problems are, and the fact that they are being solved, there is much less agreement on the intensity of the problems and, therefore, on the ways in which they are being or should be solved.

Basically what it comes down to is that some organizations feel that the disadvantaged are extraordinary people with extraordinary employment problems whose resolution requires extraordinary actions (i.e., supportive services) on the part of the employer. Other organizations agree that the hard-core are different, but not different enough to require any special actions or training programs on the employer's part.

SOME ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

It is probably already apparent that this writer feels that extraordinary measures (i.e., supportive services) are necessary if manpower programs aimed at the hard-core are to succeed in the long-run.⁵ Employers who agree with this position have been quite imaginative in developing solutions to the types of problems shown in Table I. Some of the most popular attempts to solve such problems are shown in Table II. Most of the sup-

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portive services (i.e., attempted solutions) listed in Table II are self-explanatory, and a long explanation and/or evaluation of them is outside of the purposes of this paper. Of particular interest to this writer, however, are:

- Vestibule training and
- Efforts aimed at increasing the effectiveness of supervisors in dealing with the hard-core

VESTIBULE TRAINING

Vestibule training is actually designed to prevent problems rather than solve them, and the disadvantaged, rather than the supervisors, are the recipients of the training. These are off-the-job programs designed to prepare the trainees for their new positions. Years ago, vestibule training was very limited in scope. As a rule, new employees were simply taught how to operate the equipment that they would be using on their jobs. With the hard-core, however, such programs often involve remedial education as well as attempts to socialize them into their new environment — the world of work. *Fortune magazine* says:

“The main idea behind the vestibule is that it gives the companies a chance to teach good working habits, which is difficult to do when trainees are suddenly thrown into the fast-paced atmosphere of the shop floor. A supervisor in the plant, even if he is sympathetic, has little time to counsel an employee.”⁶

There is no doubt that a carefully-planned and administered vestibule training program can do a great deal to prepare the disadvantaged and thereby reduce the degree of difficulty with which they are assimilated into the normal working environment. Because such programs include skill training, they are particularly effective in solving those problems associated with the hard-core trainees’ inability to meet normal production and quality standards. Such programs, however, are unlikely to obviate the need for some type of program directed at an organization’s supervisors and managers.

Even the most intensive employment orientation program can only make a few minor changes in the disadvantaged individual’s personality and behavior.

He will probably always remain very different not only from the average foreman but also from the individuals that such foremen have supervised in the past. Recognizing this, most companies in the JOBS program have undertaken programs designed to change their supervisors’ attitudes or behavior, or both. These programs can be separated into two broad categories:

- Those that attempt to increase a supervisor’s effectiveness by improving his understanding and/or attitudes,

TABLE I

THE DISADVANTAGED: THEIR EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTERISTICS AND THE RESULTANT PROBLEMS

<u>Their Characteristics</u>	<u>The Resultant Problems</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have very low levels of education and occupational skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent errors - low quality of production • Slow - low quantity of production • Difficult to train
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not socialized - not a part of mainstream America • They are new to the normal working environment • They feel like outsiders and view mainstream workers and supervisors with suspicion and hostility 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often late, absent, and generally confused • Seem distant, unwilling to cooperate and become part of the group • Resist change, are afraid of doing “something wrong” • Not accepted as part of the “team” and increased friction is introduced into the organization • Communications tend to break down
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not understood by mainstream workers and supervisors and are generally viewed with suspicion and hostility by them (Particularly true for trainees who are minority group members) • They are, and have usually always been poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages frequently garnished — don’t know how to handle money • Transportation problems • Often need medical and dental treatment

- Those that seek to elicit more effective supervisory behavior through the organization’s reward-penalty system.

INCREASING UNDERSTANDING AND IMPROVING ATTITUDES

Virtually all supervisory training programs that fall into this first category seek to increase management’s understanding of the disadvantaged. Employers have exposed their supervisors to lectures, films, courses in Black History, and even young militants are brought in

TABLE II
THE DISADVANTAGED: THEIR EXTRAORDINARY CHARACTERISTICS,
THE RESULTANT PROBLEMS, AND SOME ATTEMPTED SOLUTIONS

<u>Their Characteristics</u>	<u>The Resultant Problems</u>	<u>Some Attempted Solutions</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They have very low levels of education and occupational skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent errors - low quality of production • Slow - low quantity of production • Difficult to train 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vestibule training: (1) job-related basic education (reading, arith., etc.) and (2) job skills (machine operation, blueprint reading, etc.)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are not socialized - not a part of mainstream America <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are new to the normal working environment • They feel like outsiders and view mainstream workers and supervisors with suspicion and hostility • They are not understood by mainstream workers and supervisors and are generally viewed with suspicion and hostility by them (Particularly true for trainees who are minority group members) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often late, absent, and generally confused • Seem distant, unwilling to cooperate and become part of the group • Resist change, are afraid of doing "something wrong" • Not accepted as part of the "team" and increased friction is introduced into the organization • Communications tend to break down 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial orientation programs and counselling while on the job. <li style="text-align: center;">" <li style="text-align: center;">" • "Sensitivity" or other training programs for the regular members of the organization and/or attempts to elicit appropriate behavior by use of penalties/rewards
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They are, and have usually always been poor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wages frequently garnisheed - don't know how to handle money • Transportation problems • Often need medical and dental treatment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Short-run: special counselling, company provided services, cash advances. Long-run: A good job.

to "tell it like it is." In doing so these organizations are attempting to increase effectiveness by increasing understanding. This type of activity seems to be quite sound and should probably be a part of any training program for supervisors of the hard-core. As the NAM says:

"To begin with, employees need factual information... The white supervisors might also visit the ghetto... This might lead directly into a discussion of what the supervisor can expect from the hard-core trainees - their language, their dress, and the need to spend extra time in explaining the work to them."⁷

Some companies have gone one step further, and in addition to attempting to increase understanding on the part of first-line supervisors, they have also attempted to change the supervisors' attitudes toward the disadvantaged. This is usually called "sensitivity training" and

such programs have been highly recommended by Mr. Leo Beebe who, until recently was the chief operating officer of the NAB.

In an appearance before a Senate subcommittee on May 24, 1968 he indicated that he viewed "sensitivity training" as critical to the long-range success of the JOBS program. He has made similar statements since that time.⁸ Apparently Mr. Beebe's recommendations carry some weight, for the March 31, 1969 newsletter of the Detroit Chamber of Commerce reported that:

"Over 300 management people from 90 companies [who have hired the disadvantaged] have participated in the Chamber and the NAB sponsored Supervisory Training programs... Programs developed by Bell and Howell's Human Development Institute have been used exclusively... In response to expressed interest, several [more] sensitivity training sessions have been scheduled." [See Appendix B]

SENSITIVITY TRAINING

Sensitivity training is a relatively recent addition to the field of human learning and development. It can take many forms but perhaps the purest form is the "T" (for training) group. T-groups are essentially small, leaderless discussion groups usually composed of people who are there to increase their understanding of their own feelings, the feelings of other people, and the impact of their behavior on others. These groups have no specific problems to solve, no agenda, and no rules although the members are usually given to understand that they are to discuss and learn from the behavior that is exhibited in the group rather than problems or events that exist or have existed outside of the group. (An emphasis on the "here-and-now" rather than the "there-and-then"). There is also a strong emphasis on frank

and open communication and on analyzing the feelings and emotions of the group members.⁹

Many behavioral scientists feel that this type of experientially and emotionally-based learning is the most effective (and perhaps the only) method for bringing about changes in attitudes. It is probably this potential for effecting attitude change that brought this technique to the attention of those interested in training the supervisors of the newly-employed hard-core. Upon closer examination, however, they must have realized that the traditional T-groups were probably not entirely suitable for what they had in mind. This is because T-groups are:

- **VERY EXPENSIVE.** Not many people are qualified to conduct T-groups. Those that are generally have advanced degrees in the behavioral sciences, and they know that serving as a T-group trainer is hard work. Thus, their fees range between \$250 and \$600 per day, plus expenses. Further the cost-per-trainee remains relatively high because most trainees insist that there be no more than fifteen members in a T-group.
- **A LITTLE RISKY.** T-groups can get out of control. Not everyone is ready for frank and intensive feedback concerning his behavior. Nor is everyone capable of dealing with the high levels of anxiety that T-groups generate.
- **TOO UNSTRUCTURED.** There is no way of guaranteeing what subjects or problems a T-group will focus on. If you wish to impart some very specific information (e.g., what to expect from the newly-employed hard-core) T-groups may be inferior to alternative training techniques.

Today, the traditional T-groups are very seldom used on an intra-organizational basis. Instead, the trend seems to be toward "mixed" sensitivity training programs, i.e., those that maintain only some of the characteristics of the T-group.¹⁰ The previously-mentioned program designed by the Human Development Institute and used by the NAB in Detroit is an example of such a program. It is an intensive one-day workshop which emphasized experiential learning, discussions of feelings, and feedback. It is, however, highly struc-

ured and makes use of such standard teaching aids as films and lectures. It qualifies for the "sensitivity training" label principally because of its objective — making supervisors more aware or sensitive to the feelings and problems of the newly-employed hard-core.

While mixed programs avoid the previously-mentioned liabilities of T-groups, it should also be remembered that they sacrifice the unique potential that T-groups have for impacting the personality and/or changing behavior. Such mixed programs could prove very useful for training supervisors or other members of the organization. There are many of these programs available, but they should be carefully evaluated before being purchased by an employer. Unfortunately the "sensitivity training" label may sometimes be used to add sizzle to a not-so-hot steak.

ELICITING APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOR THROUGH PENALTIES AND REWARDS

Other organizations make no attempt to change the attitudes of their supervisors or to improve their understanding of the disadvantaged — no training programs per se. Instead they seek to elicit appropriate supervisory behavior toward the newly-employed hard-core through the use of penalties and rewards. The "tell 'em" approach which is apparently being taken by General Motors certainly fits into this category. On July 11, 1969 the *Wall Street Journal* reported:

"G.M. alone absorbed nearly one out of every five hard-core unemployed workers placed during the first year of the NAB's massive hiring program . . . Some of G.M.'s competitors are slightly envious of its ability to translate its policies on hiring and promoting blacks into terms that supervisors can identify with. Instead of stressing changes in attitudes, G.M. seems to have cleansed its program of ideological or racial overtones and placed the emphasis on the behavior of the supervisor. The implied message: Play ball, or get off the team."¹¹

Other companies have taken a similar but, in a sense, a more positive approach. In these organizations, the

supervisors are simply told that their performance will be evaluated not only on the basis of the quantity and quality of production turned out by their group, but also on how well they retain and develop those disadvantaged people who are assigned to them. This approach has the same no-nonsense flavor as G.M.'s but it adds the inducement of possible rewards for superior performance. It also makes eminently good sense. In fact, it makes such good sense that one wonders why it should be limited to supervisors of the newly-employed hard-core. Shouldn't all managers and supervisors be evaluated on how well they develop and utilize the organization's human resources? The costs associated with the malutilization of human capital (e.g., excessive turnover, absenteeism, and employees who "don't give a damn") are probably at least as high as those associated with the inefficient use of land, equipment, and investment capital.

CONCLUSION

The recent influx of economically and culturally-disadvantaged people, most of them minority group members, into industry poses a number of extraordinary problems. Employers have attempted to solve these problems in several different ways. Training programs have focused on both the newly-employed hard-core and on supervisors. Vestibule training programs attempt to raise the trainees' skill levels and, at the same time, assist them in adjusting to the life of a mainstream American worker. Supervisory training programs have attempted to improve a supervisor's understanding of the hard-core and his attitudes toward them. Further, some organizations have told their supervisors that they are to develop and retain these new employees, that any interpersonal difficulties must be eliminated, and that the supervisors' performance in this matter would be an important consideration when decisions concerning promotions, salary increases, etc. are made. It is becoming increasingly apparent that the successful assimilation of the disad-

vantaged into mainstream America is, and will continue to be, dependent upon the judicious use of extra-ordinary measures such as these.

It is also increasingly apparent that any one of these efforts, by itself, will not be enough. If the manpower programs are to be successful, the disadvantaged need special training. They need to change, to adjust. So do we.

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2. National Association of Manufacturers, *op. cit.*
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4. For example see: "A Year of Awakening: An interview with Leo Beebe," *Manpower*, Manpower Administration, U.S. Department of Labor, May 1969, p. 26. Similar assertions were also made in interviews conducted by the writer with several employer representatives who attended a conference held at Michigan State University on Feb. 27 & 28, 1969 and entitled, "Effectively Utilizing the Disadvantaged Employee." For a report on the conference see: Virginia W. Baird, "Employing the Disadvantaged Fraught With Challenges," *Training and Development Journal*, July 1969, pp. 44-46.
5. Everyone is anxious to see some research findings in this area, i.e., single-company, matched-samples, same-job designs with the experimental groups receiving various combinations of supportive services.
6. Allen T. Demaree, "Business Picks Up the Urban Challenge," *Fortune*, Apr. 1969, p. 104.
7. National Association of Manufacturers, *op. cit.*

8. Hearings before the Subcommittee on Employment, Manpower, and Poverty of the Committee on Labor and Public Welfare, United States Senate, "Employment and Training Legislation - 1968", U.S. Government Printing Office, 1968, p. 705. Also see Mr. Beebe's comments in: "Hard-Core Jobless Get a Friend at the Top," *Business Week*, Mar. 8, 1969, p. 66.
9. Sensitivity training and T-groups are notoriously difficult to describe. The description in this paper is based on the information contained in: Edgar H. Schein and Warren G. Bennis, *Personal and Organizational Change Through Group Methods*, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1965.
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