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*New-Employee Orientation, Organization Cultures,  
Course Design and Development, Case Studies*

# From New Recruit to Team Member

BY KAREN BRIDGES, GAIL HAWKINS, AND KELI ELLEDGE

**MICRON TECHNOLOGY'S INNOVATIVE PROGRAM GUIDES NEW EMPLOYEES THROUGH THE CORPORATE CULTURE AND TRAINS THEM TO BECOME VALUED MEMBERS OF THE COMPANY TEAM. THIS CASE STUDY INCLUDES A COURSE OUTLINE.**

Patricia Jones has worked at her new job for 30 days. She works a night shift in a position that is completely new to her. The industry jargon sounds to her like a foreign language. Jones must watch and listen carefully to interpret the events that are happening around her; she hesitates to ask questions, for fear that co-workers will think she is incompetent. She feels exhausted from the physical strain of adjusting to the late hours and the mental strain of learning a new job and a strange vocabulary.

Frank Smith has worked in his new position for three months. At first, he was excited about joining a fast-paced, growing industry, but now he's having doubts. He can't quite grasp what the company is about. Frank keeps hearing about how important his job is to the company, but he doesn't understand how his work contributes to the whole. His exposure to the company is limited to his department, the employee cafeteria, and the payroll office.

Jorge Jimenez has invested nine months in a new career. He is frustrated. Since his first day in engineer-

ing, he has heard about the importance of contributing to the team. He's tried every way he knows to contribute to the team, but no one seems interested in his ideas. He wants to advance in the organization but can't find any avenues for making that happen. He's decided it's time to leave the company and look elsewhere.

Jones, Smith, and Jimenez aren't real people, but their problems represent real concerns and challenges at Micron Technology, a computer-chip manufacturing company in Boise, Idaho.

Part of the challenge is that Micron is a rapidly growing company. From 1988 to 1992 it grew from 2,000 employees to more than 4,200.

Micron has other challenges, too. Most people don't think of Boise as a multicultural environment, but Micron certainly is. For many employees, English is a second language; Micron workers speak more than 40 languages. Helping multicultural employees become oriented to the corporate culture poses yet another challenge.

## Training for high performance

Micron was concerned that some new employees were struggling to achieve a sense of belonging in the company. Valuable production time and money were being lost because new employees were overwhelmed or confused, didn't understand the links between their jobs and the whole, and felt frustrated by a perceived lack of opportunity. Those employees seemed less satisfied, less productive, and less likely to remain with the firm than employees who felt more comfortable at Micron.

When Micron's personnel staff evaluated the company's new-employee orientation process, they saw that new employees were immediately immersed in the Micron culture, with little guidance. New employees became team members without receiving information about the responsibilities that entailed. In other words, the system was based on the assumption that all people immediately understood Micron's operations and already had the necessary skills for effective teamwork.

The training department replaced that assumption with a new 15-hour training class called "Reaching High Performance," or RHP, designed to introduce employees to the Micron team. Because the company wanted the course to include an introduction to Micron's culture, the training department decided to develop the program internally.

The training department recruited Micron employees from different areas of the company. Those employees formed the RHP design team. The team represented a variety of skills and experience: It included two training designers, one personnel employee, two production managers, and three production operators. The team met one to three hours per week for three months to develop, review, and modify the course material.

The design team's major challenge was to develop a program that would accurately communicate the company's culture in an interesting and useful way. Every employee would go through the program during his or her first year of employment.

The team realized that the training would succeed only if all Micron

managers supported the course. So design-team members presented a preliminary version of RHP to 350 Micron managers and supervisors. The team used the managers' feedback to fine-tune the course and modify the content, always keeping in mind the company's philosophy and directions.

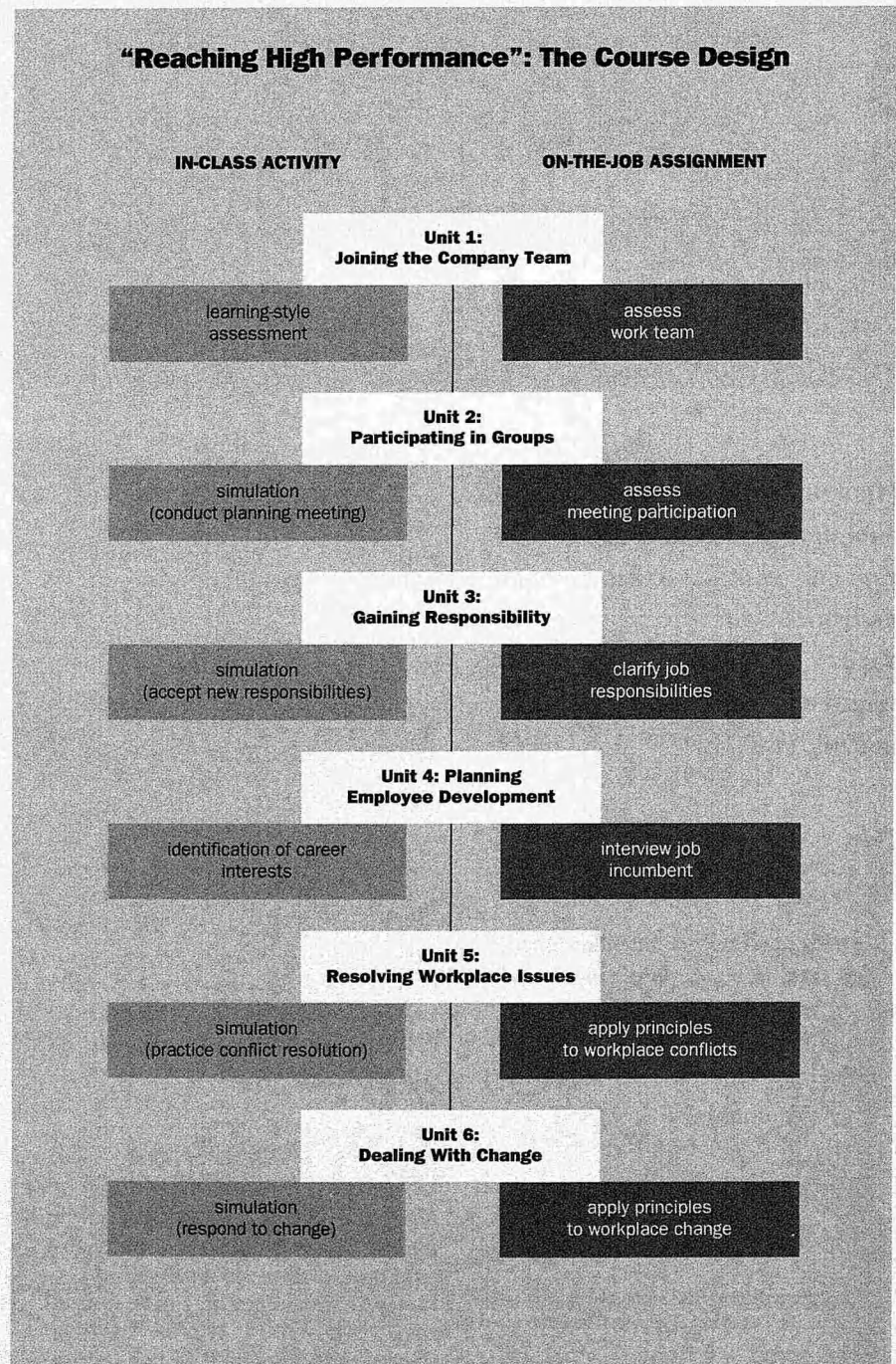
That approach paid off. The managers and supervisors reinforced the course objectives with their employees who participated in the course.

The top-down introduction process is still viewed as one of the keys to the success of the program.

## Six course units

The design team developed two-and-a-half-hour sessions that can accommodate 30 participants, who meet once a week for six weeks. RHP includes units on the following topics:

- ▶ joining the company team
- ▶ participating in groups
- ▶ gaining responsibility



- ▶ planning employee development
- ▶ resolving workplace issues
- ▶ dealing with change.

The box, "Reaching High Performance": The Course Design," shows the flow of topics for the course, including the in-class activities and the application assignments that go along with each unit.

In addition to a facilitator, each RHP unit has a co-facilitator—a supervisor or manager from one of various departments of the company. The co-facilitator provides important management perspectives as the course material is delivered.

Class activities allow participants to apply the new material as they learn it. At the end of each unit, participants receive assignments that give them further opportunities to apply the information. Most units open with group discussions of the completed assignments from the units before.

Another common thread that ties the units together is a series of simulations called the Production Process. The purpose of the simulations is twofold:

- ▶ to build a team in the classroom to allow the instructor and trainees to examine the effectiveness of group interactions among the trainees
- ▶ to give trainees an opportunity to apply the information and skills learned in each unit and explore ways to apply those skills to their jobs.

Here is a rundown of the six units of the RHP program.

**Joining the company team.** The RHP program begins with a unit on the Micron company team. This unit focuses on the company's history and mission, stages of team development, and individual team behavior styles.

**Participating in groups.** The second unit focuses on the company's expectations for participation in meetings. It looks at the different kinds of meetings held at Micron, the group dynamics that occur in meetings, and specific techniques employees can use to become more effective contributors. This unit also covers methods of dealing with speaking anxiety and alternatives to speaking up in meetings—information that is especially important to employees who have difficulty expressing themselves in English.

This unit introduces participants to the Production Process simulation

series. The process has three phases:

- ▶ team meeting
- ▶ production, including delivery of mock products to "customers" (the facilitator and co-facilitator)
- ▶ evaluation.

Here's how the simulation works in the group-participation stage. A "supervisor of the day" is randomly selected from each team of four to six participants. The supervisor is trained to make the "product," an object made of folded origami paper. During the team meeting, the supervisor trains the other team members to make the product, as well.

The team delegates job responsibilities based on the skills of the team members. For example, someone who is good with figures might become the team's accountant, responsible for keeping track of how many pieces of paper are "purchased" and how many products are "sold."

During production, the teams must follow written instructions describing exactly how to fold the paper, with the customer's precise specifications for the product. Once the team delivers a product to the customer, it cannot be returned for rework. If the cus-

tom determines that a product does not satisfy the standards spelled out in the specifications, the product must be scrapped.

tomer determines that a product does not satisfy the standards spelled out in the specifications, the product must be scrapped. If the customer would like to hold in two years. Then the interviewer develops a list of technical and personal skills required for the position, including notes on how to acquire those skills.

The teams examine the differences in the quality and quantity of products sold during the two production processes. The comparison helps participants see the importance of asking questions and clarifying responsibilities.

**Planning employee development.** This is a more reflective, individual unit. It looks at career development for employees in the following three stages:

- ▶ where employees would like to be over the long term
- ▶ where employees are today
- ▶ where employees might like to be in several years.

The unit provides participants with techniques for writing a job profile—an analysis of job responsibilities, tasks, and standards. Each participant interviews someone in the company who holds a position that he or she

## IF THE CUSTOMER DETERMINES THAT A PRODUCT DOES NOT SATISFY THE STANDARDS SPELLED OUT IN THE SPECIFICATIONS, THE PRODUCT MUST BE SCRAPPED

tomer determines that a product does not satisfy the standards spelled out in the specifications, the product must be scrapped.

The evaluation phase allows teams to calculate their profit-and-loss statements and record any scrapped products. Team members also discuss the effectiveness of their meetings and other interactions.

**Gaining responsibility.** The third unit in the RHP course is designed to show participants how to take charge of new assignments. Again, the facilitators use the simulation process. But this simulation builds on skills participants learned while "manufacturing" the origami product

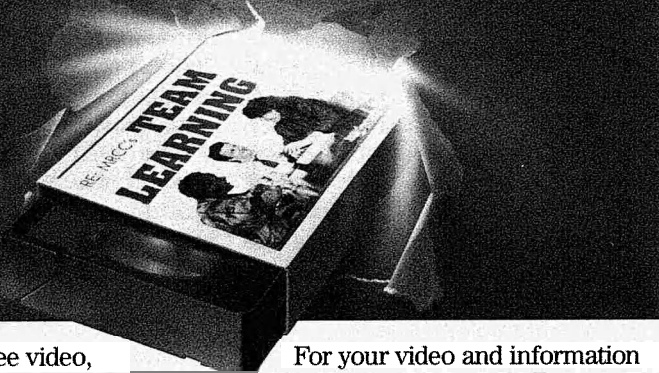
would like to hold in two years. Then the interviewer develops a list of technical and personal skills required for the position, including notes on how to acquire those skills.

The employee-development unit also covers the performance-evaluation process and gives participants the opportunity to role-play evaluation interviews.

**Resolving workplace issues.** This unit presents five methods for handling conflict, including steps for win/win conflict resolution.

During the Production Process simulation in this unit, the class purposely generates conflict within and among the teams. The instructors

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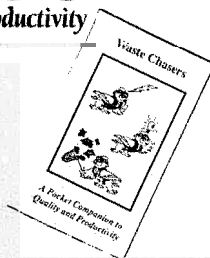
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and co-facilitators role-play different methods of handling conflict. Participants review the company's problem-resolution procedure, which is used whenever employees have exhausted their own resources for resolving problems.

**Dealing with change.** A simulation used in this unit shows employees the effects of unwelcome change. For example, members of teams may be told to move to other teams, the time allowed for production may be shortened in the middle of the process, and product specifications might change in midstream.

The teams' methods of dealing with change provide the foundation for discussing how participants can respond more effectively when changes occur on the job.

### Translating values to action

The course concludes with an assessment of how each team proceeded through the stages of group development during the six sessions, how each team's profit-and-loss statements reflected the development phases, and how differences in the teams' behavior preferences were reflected in each team's dynamics.

"Reaching High Performance" was first offered in January 1991. Some Micron employees still have not had the opportunity to take the course, but the RHP concept has become a part of the everyday language at Micron.

Once employees understand the company's values and understand how their department's goals and individual goals support those values through the RHP course, the company hopes that employees will be more motivated, will take more initiative, and will have greater job satisfaction. ■

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