

DETERMINING SUPERVISORY TRAINING NEEDS AND SETTING OBJECTIVES

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In the first article of this series, I emphasized the need for a philosophy which placed the responsibility for supervisory training on the supervisor, the immediate superior and the organization itself. I also stressed the climate must be right if supervisory training is going to be effective, referring specifically to the work environment a supervisor enters after attending supervisory training classes. A "preventive" or "discouraging" climate will probably mean that no change will occur in the supervisor's on-the-job behavior. A "neutral," "encouraging" or "requiring" climate, on the other hand, will mean that changes in behavior will probably take place providing the supervisor is ready, willing and able.

Determining Needs

The purpose of supervisory training is to improve the performance of those who attend. The first step is to determine supervisory training needs — the know-

ledge, skills and attitudes that should be changed to improve performance.

There are many approaches for determining these needs. Some of them are:

1. Analyzing the supervisor's job.
2. Analyzing problems.
3. Asking the supervisors themselves:
4. Asking their superiors.
5. Asking their subordinates.
6. Testing knowledge and / or skills.
7. Observing supervisory behavior.
8. Analyzing performance - appraisal information.
9. Conducting exit interviews.
10. Using an advisory committee.
11. Studying what other organizations are doing.
12. Identifying universal training needs.

All of these approaches can provide valuable information on needs. Let's briefly examine each one to see how and why to do it.

1. *Analyzing the Supervisor's Job:* This is probably a good place to start if your organization has

up-to-date job descriptions. This would identify the duties and responsibilities of a supervisor and indicate some knowledges and skills that are required to perform the job effectively.

2. *Analyzing Problems:* High turnover, numerous accidents, excessive scrap, high costs, and low productivity would be indicators of possible deficiencies in the supervisor. Obviously, these poor results are not all corrected by training of supervisors, but they would provide a place to start. The causes of each problem should be determined and immediate steps should be taken to correct them. One step might be training supervisors in such areas as orientation and training of new employees, communication, and motivation. Improved supervisory performance in one or more of these areas may solve the problem.

3. *Asking the Supervisors Themselves:* Who knows better than people themselves what they need? The answer to this question is debatable, of course. Here we are looking for "felt needs" — things the supervisors themselves feel

they need. This information is very important for two reasons. First, the very process of asking them what they need helps establish respect for the training professional. The process tells supervisors "we want to help you but you have to tell us what will help you."

The February, 1977 *Training and Development Journal* carried an article on "Determining Training Needs: Four Simple and Effective Approaches."¹ The article included a survey form that can be effectively used to get "felt needs" from the supervisor. This information can also be obtained by interviewing supervisors. Interviews would take much longer but would give more in-depth information. The survey form can obtain more quantitative data in a much shorter time.

4. Asking Their Bosses: Many times the immediate superior of the supervisor knows more (or thinks so, anyway) about what supervisors need than do the supervisors themselves! This information can be obtained by using a survey form and/or interviews.

5. Asking Their Subordinates: This approach can provide much valuable information but it could do so at a very high cost. The high cost would be the negative attitudes of supervisors when their subordinates are asked "What's wrong with your supervisor?" Attitude surveys which are anonymous can provide some indicators of supervisory training needs. If supervisors are willing for their subordinates to be surveyed in regard to specific supervisory training needs, this approach can be very productive. If they aren't willing, don't do it!

6. Testing Knowledge and/or Skills of Supervisors: A golf pro would tell a pupil to "hit a few" before teaching. Likewise, before conducting supervisory training courses, trainers should try to determine where supervisors are in terms of attitudes, knowledge and skills. This would point out the needs. For example, if the company has a labor union, the supervisors and foremen must understand the labor agreement (union contract).

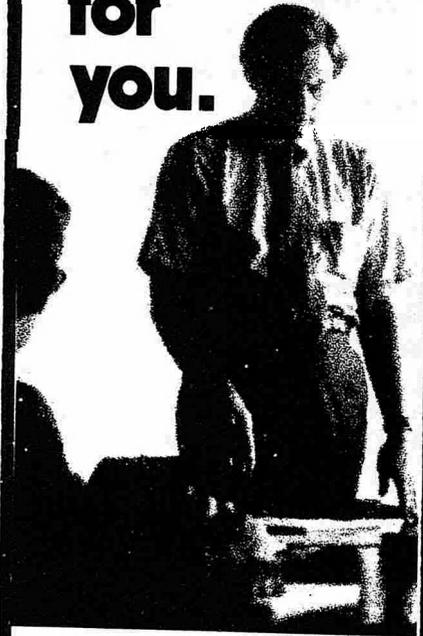
A quiz could be prepared to test present knowledge and understanding. The training course could be built on test results. Likewise, if there is a question about the knowledge of company rules, policies and procedures, supervisors could be tested. In the area of communication, human relations and safety, "Supervisory Inventories" are available which can be given as a pretest to determine needs.² These paper-and-pencil tests are useful in determining attitudes and knowledge. Performance tests are needed to measure skills.

7. Observing Supervisory Behavior: This approach is not as objective as some of the previously described approaches, but can provide some indicators of training needs. For example, training professionals may periodically tour the plant or office to talk with supervisors. They can observe how the supervisor behaves in such areas as presenting ideas, listening, enforcing rules, making out reports, planning, use of time, and attitude toward employees. A compilation of these observations will suggest needs.

8. Analyzing Performance Appraisal Forms: Where there is a formal performance-review program that is effective, this can be one of the best sources of supervisory training needs. The immediate superior probably spent a lot of time appraising performance and determining training needs. This information should be compiled to determine common training needs. Unfortunately, this approach is rarely used, for two reasons. First, the program is not effective and little time and effort was put into it. Therefore, the information is not useful. Second, training people don't go to the trouble of studying the information. Frequently, the performance review program is under the direction of someone other than the training director. And the training director doesn't realize the usefulness of the performance review information.

9. Conducting Exit Interviews: Some of the best information regarding supervisory training needs can come from employees who

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Figure 1.

KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVES

In supervisory training, we are frequently trying to accomplish knowledge objectives. A good way to state the objectives is to begin with the statement: "When the training is completed, the learner should be able to do the following:"

SUBJECT	KNOWLEDGE OBJECTIVE
1. Human Relations (Leadership & Motivation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> List in sequence "Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs". List in order of frequency, Herzberg's: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Dissatisfiers Satisfiers Describe at least five assumptions of Theory "X" managers. Describe at least five assumptions of Theory "Y" managers. Give the name that Likert uses to describe each of his four systems of leadership.
2. Management By Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Define MBO. List three objectives of an MBO program. List eight characteristics of good objectives. Describe the role of the subordinate in setting objectives.
3. Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Define the word "communicate." List six barriers that can be directly related to the sender. List six barriers that can be directly related to the receiver. List the five "c's" of an effective written communication.

SKILL OBJECTIVES

Skill objectives are more difficult to accomplish than knowledge objectives. Knowledge objectives are understandings. Skill objectives require an ability to do something. Here are some possible objectives in a supervisory training program.

SUBJECT	SKILL OBJECTIVE
1. Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Write a memo that is clear, complete, concise, correct and considerate. Give a five-minute oral presentation that receives an average rating of 4 (scale of 5) from the listeners. Listen to a five-minute presentation and list the three main ideas covered.
2. Performance Appraisal	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Complete a performance-appraisal form that accurately describes the performance of a subordinate. Conduct a performance-appraisal interview so that interviewee: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Understands parts of job he/she is doing. Understands what one area of performance needs improvement. Understands at least three things that can be done to improve performance. Feels that the interview was worthwhile. Has a positive attitude toward the interviewer.

ATTITUDE OBJECTIVES

Not all programs have attitude objectives that can be clearly identified. Here are some that might be appropriate:

SUBJECT	ATTITUDE OBJECTIVE
1. Human Relations (Leadership & Motivation)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Believes that positive employee attitudes are necessary for maximum productivity. Believes that minority employees can perform effectively. Believes that employees have ideas that can contribute to the effectiveness of the department. Believes that most employees will do what the supervisor expects.
2. Management By Objectives	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Believes that MBO is worth the time and effort. Believes that subordinates should be involved in setting their own objectives. Is committed to doing MBO on a systematic basis.
3. Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Feels that employees should be told what they want to know and not just what they need to know. Believes that upward communications depends on rapport between supervisor and employees. Believes that listening to employees' problems is a wise use of time.

quit. If the interviews are well-conducted with every employee who leaves, the data can become very meaningful. The interviews must be conducted by a neutral person (not the supervisor of the exiting employee) who knows what information to get and how to get it.

10. *Using an Advisory Committee:* In addition to the techniques suggested above, an advisory committee can be effectively used. It should consist of 6-10 managers at all levels and representing all departments. The purpose of the committee would be to "give advice" and not make the decision. The data from surveys, interviews and other sources should be presented to the committee for analysis and recommendations. A side effect of this process can be the enthusiasm of committee members for the training program. These people can help sell the program and even take an active role in it.

11. *Studying What Other Organizations Are Doing:* Many organizations exchange ideas with other training professionals and ask, "What courses are you offering your supervisors?" This approach provides suggestions, but care should be taken that your needs are the same as theirs.

12. *Universal Training Needs:* The most common approach to determining needs is when the training professional, the president of the company, or the personnel manager says "I know what they need. They need some basic training in human relations and communications!" And I happen to believe that they are probably right in nearly every case. Unless supervisors have had considerable training in these two areas, they can surely learn things that will help them perform effectively. These "universal needs" could include such topics as communication, motivation, decision-making, self-improvement and time management.

Where should you begin to determine training needs? I would suggest that you use as many of these 12 approaches as possible. The more data you gather, the better! If different sources provide the same needs, that's fine. If they

provide conflicting information, analyze it carefully, use an advisory committee, and keep checking to see how you are doing. (The final article in the series will be on evaluation, which will help keep you "honest.")

When all else fails and you don't know what to do, call in a training consultant to help. But be sure you check carefully to be sure the consultant can really help you. This would include a discussion concerning the approach the consultant would use as well as checking references supplied by the consultant's past clients.

Setting Objectives

If we are going to do an effective job of training and development, we must determine just what we want to accomplish. The end objective, of course, is improved results in such areas as more quantity, fewer accidents, better quality, lower cost, more profits, better return on investment, improved morale, and lower turnover. In order to accomplish these results,

we want to change the job behavior of the trainee. In order to change the behavior, three kinds of objectives can be established: knowledge, skill, and attitude. When stated, the objectives should be stated from the learner's standpoint instead of the trainer's. They should be stated as specifically as possible and should be under the control of the trainer. Figure 1 presents some examples.

If your supervisory training program is going to be successful, it must be based on the needs of supervisors in your organization! These needs should be carefully determined through a variety of methods. The needs must then be converted to objectives — what do we want to accomplish in a training program. With these two solid foundations (needs and objectives), specific plans can be made of what to do and how to do it.

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