

"TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS OFTEN LOSE SIGHT OF THE REAL PURPOSE OF MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT."

MAKING MANAGEMENT DEVELOPMENT PAY OFF

BY H. GABORA

In this era of tighter budgets, management-development departments are a highly visible target. It is critical that management training professionals question their strategies and re-examine their methodologies to provide products and services with a visible payoff.

This article is addressed to training professionals and corporate executives who want a greater return on investment from management - development departments. The focus is on ways to replace outdated training programs with services that will have job relevance and organizational impact.

Often we hear managers who have attended management development workshops commenting:

"The course was interesting but it had little direct relation to my job."

"I enjoyed the course but I didn't come away with skills immediately usable on the job."

"I tried to apply the ideas on the job, but I don't get much

support from my boss."

"The course was too general and didn't deal with real-life problems."

Such sentiments indicate the following major complaints directed at management development efforts:

- Many general management courses consist of long series of topics such as motivation, communications, leadership, morale difficulties, budgeting, etc. This "smorgasbord approach" typically results in participants developing an extended vocabulary of buzz words, but few immediately usable skills. Participants become frustrated when they return to the job and try to solve real problems by referring to the solutions provided during the superficial coverage.

- Many courses subject participants to nonvalidated concepts which are oversold as the "elixir" for instant success. For example, many human relations programs and techniques that managers have been subjected to, over the past decade, have placed increasing emphasis on the values of one leadership style (theory "Y" or

9:9). Many companies enthusiastically rushed blindly into programs that attempted to teach a single ideal style and behavior. Research suggests that there is no "ideal" style and that diverse styles can improve the functioning of individual managers and organizations.

- Most management - development programs do not provide a follow-up consultative service that will help the manager put new ideas into practice. All too often a manager will attend a program, learn something new about management, return to the job and find the job environment such that he or she cannot utilize new competencies. New concepts and methods by themselves are relatively ineffective. Most programs do not deal directly with blockages in the organization system. The individual may have been renewed but the organization unfortunately remains the same.

Many management-development departments have lost sight of what their organizations really want. Managers want learning opportunities that will provide them with hard skills that can be used to

solve real problems on the job. They also seek a work environment where the application of these new skills is encouraged, reinforced and rewarded. Corporate executives want cost-effective programs that have a positive impact on the organization. They want the training department's contributions to the organization measured in the same way that the line department's contributions are measured. If the training department does not meet these concerns management should take their interest and money elsewhere.

Possible Causes

The possible causes for the lack of impact of many management-development programs include the following:

1. *Quantity vs. Quality:* Training departments tend to lose perspective as to why they are doing training. Too often the main purpose of the department is to keep on filling the maximum number of spaces on courses. The focus is on "throughput" rather than effectiveness.

2. *Gimmicks vs. Needs:* Many training courses are unnecessary or inappropriate because they are based on what trainers think is required. The thinking of trainers is often influenced as much by popular trends as by rigorous needs analysis.

3. *"Happiness" Ratings vs. Results Documentation:* The training department's schedule for future courses is often based on immediate postcourse "happiness" ratings of courses that were well attended during the previous year. The time to assess the real effects of a course is not during the first few weeks but after six months, or even a year. What should be documented is not the feelings of participants toward the course but the results obtained from applying new skills on the job. The documentation of applications on the job will help determine the contribution of the training toward organization effectiveness.

4. *Individual Manager Development vs. Organization Development:* Traditional management-development programs have been based on the belief that the indi-

vidual manager is the primary target for change. The newer focus is on changing not only the individual but the working climate and methods of the organization. Management development provides the manager with skills which improve personal competence while organization development attempts to create conditions in which the manager can utilize his or her skills. Both strategies are required for job relevance and organization impact.

Corrective Action

The challenge facing today's training professionals is to give their organization a bigger payoff from investments in management development. Some key strategies and tactics are:

1. *Link to Corporate Objectives:* We must ensure that management-development plans are intimately meshed with the corporate business plan. Unfortunately, many training managers are so isolated within the personnel department that they are unaware of the corporate executives' viewpoints. The more the training manager knows about the goals and values of top management, the more the development effort will be successful.

Integration of management development with corporate objectives improves when long-range management - development plans are reviewed by a committee representing corporate executives. Ideally, some members of the advisory group should be the same people who control and set broad business policy. This will ensure that management-development objectives become an integral part of the management strategy of the business.

2. *Link Management Development With an Internal Consulting Service:* The role of the trainer requires redefinition. In the past a trainer was a person who gave courses. These responsibilities should be reshaped into a balance between training and consulting. This role requires the trainer to also be an advisor to management on human-resource problems, and as internal consultant.

The new role of advisor requires the specialist to help management

to determine the cause of problems and to ascertain if they can be solved by training or other means. The most cost-effective solution and method of implementation is recommended. If training is the appropriate solution, this person can advise on the method of training (workshop, on-the-job training, job coaching, etc.)

In the role of internal consultant, the specialist can assist managers who participate in a management-development program to apply their new skills to solve real problems back on the job. This approach will encourage managers to use their skills and help to improve the overall functioning of the work unit.

3. *Question the Training Plan:* A critical review of the management-development department's current plan is an excellent way to focus attention on the purpose of training, its benefits and costs. Program effectiveness results from asking questions such as the following:

- For what reason is the program being delivered?
- What should the end result of the activity be?
- What actual results have we been getting?
- Are there alternative ways to accomplish the expected results?
- How are we measuring the effectiveness of the program?
- Have the key concepts in the training design been validated? What is the research base?
- What are the possible adverse consequences of using this design?

This data, made visible, typically results in the following actions:

a) Unproductive programs are weeded out. Pareto's law says that "in any group of programs a vital few of those programs account for the bulk of the benefits of all the programs."

b) Broad, catchall, general management courses are pruned and usually replaced by short skill-building courses dealing with a specific problem, technique or process that is needed to meet corporate plans.

c) The design of program mod-

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ules will tend to focus on usable skills rather than fads or unproven "gimmicks." The questioning process will help trainers to discover that it is presumptuous to expect deeply entrenched personality patterns to be changed, in any radical way, by a brief exposure to the latest behavioral science theory.

4. *Plan Program Interfacing:* Consideration should be given to building on the skills developed by participants in the various programs offered by the training department. For example, key ideas from a core program such as problem-solving and decision-making could be integrated into other programs such as making presentations or conducting meetings. This linking of programs will encourage the reinforcement of core ideas and an improved understanding in the organization of key terms and concepts. This helps to incrementally assist managers to make their life easier rather than confusing participants with a bewildering variety of conflicting concepts and viewpoints.

5. *Use Realistic Learning Activities:* No management-development program will result in changed behavior on the job unless the following conditions are met:

- a) Participants recognize the need for change.
- b) There is a visible payoff associated with the change.
- c) The changed behavior is practiced.

Spellbinding oratory may leave them dazzled, but this will not result in behavioral change on the job. The challenge for the trainer is to design learning exercises that closely simulate job conditions. Some management games bear the same relationship to reality as the game of *Risk* to international diplomacy. Appropriate use of realistic simulations will stimulate the desire to learn. Participants will achieve their personal goals if the focus of the program is on developing skills that can be applied im-

mediately on the job. Little that is new will be retained by participants unless it is practiced and critiqued in the workshop, and practiced within the first three weeks of returning to the job.

6. *Involve the Boss:* It does little good to provide development on dimensions which are not valued by superiors. For example, if the climate in a line organization does not reinforce a development program which focuses on awareness, trust and openness, the program will simply frustrate participants. Failure to recognize practical operating conditions or adherence to a theoretical point of view will quickly alienate line managers.

The "make or break" factor is the attitude of the person's immediate boss. If he or she is sympathetic and supportive, the program participant will have ample opportunities to improve performance. But if the boss is negative and ever ready to denigrate new ideas the participant's performance may deteriorate to a point below his or her precourse standard.

It is critical to structure a precourse format that will involve the boss in a management coaching session with the subordinate. Following completion of the workshop, the subordinate should engage the boss in a discussion on how to apply these ideas on the job. These steps must be consciously built into the design of the workshop to make these discussions happen.

On some programs it is desirable to have the boss attend the workshop with his/her subordinates. This allows for investigation of interpersonal and structural problems that may be blocking teamwork and productivity. This approach bridges the gap between the conference room and reality by feeding work issues into the development experience to use as a basis for changes and job-improvement planning. Department teams working together provide the best

payoff in improving individual performance and organization effectiveness.

Another good way to involve the boss is to charge him or her for the program. If management-development budget costs are charged directly to users, line managers will have a greater ownership and vested interest in evaluating and getting results from programs. Managers should have the freedom to buy the products and services of the in-house management-development department or purchase from any other external source.

7. *Limit Participation:* Payoff will be increased if entrance to training programs is limited to those participants who will be able to immediately apply the skills learned during the program. For example, registration for a "making presentations" workshop should be restricted to individuals who are planning to make an important presentation in the near future. "Employment interviewing" workshops should be restricted to those who are preparing for an extensive employment interviewing program; registration on a "decision-making" program should be restricted to those individuals who have a wide discretionary latitude in decision-making. If required, the training specialist can assist managers in problem analysis to identify specific problems and individual requirements, to ascertain if training is appropriate, and if so what kind of training.

8. *Provide Reinforcement:* The greatest potential value of seminars and workshops is often lost because of the failure of training departments to provide effective follow-up. Few programs offer the kind of reinforcement that is necessary for short learning experiences to result in changed behavior. Those changes which were experienced need to be reinforced periodically in order to be internalized and then retained over months and years. If the changed behavior

is not retained, this results in wasted time and money.

Periodic refresher programs provide a means for consolidating understanding of concepts and making sure that the participants feel comfortable using the techniques learned on a management-development program. Refreshers also provide an opportunity to reward individuals with successful on-the-job applications with recognition and encouragement.

9. *Find Out If It Works:* Application on the job is what it is all about! Application is the payoff in training that justifies the training expense and continued investment.

How many management-development trainers follow their own advice when they tell participants on training sessions that "if you can't measure it you can't control it, and if you can't control it you can't manage it." And yet, management trainers cannot possibly do the job if their role is constrained to running formal in-house seminars.

Priorities Must Be Changed

The priorities of management trainers must be changed to focus on teaching, consulting and results documentation. For example, for every week a trainer spends teaching a program, an additional week should be budgeted for follow-up consulting and documentation of application. The documentation sessions could involve one-on-one or group interviews with course participants.

The following are some typical questions to ask in an interview when trying to document results:

What results have you achieved?

- *what do you mean by that?*

- *could you be more specific?*

Were these the results you expected?

What were the range of applications? What was the impact?

Of the ideas covered, which have been of most value?

What difficulties have you had in applying the ideas?

What have been your most successful applications?

What was the total cost of your participation in the management development program?

What would you project the return on your investment to be through the first year?

Some benefits of management-development programs are difficult to quantify. This is frequently the case with objectives such as the improvement of interdepartment cooperation. Some byproducts of programs which have valid intrinsic values such as an increased ability to cope with frustration in the organization may be impossible to quantify. While all results cannot be measured, the basic challenge remains to find out if it works, how much it costs and what the tangible and intangible benefits are.

Conclusion

Training and development professionals often lose sight of the real purpose of management development. The consequence is that the end result of training activities may not add up to a significant impact on the organization. Busy management - development efforts will not be effective until the training department is clear on what it should be busy doing. On-the-job payoff is what management development is all about. The training strategies I have identified will help to provide better ways in which the training function can help to improve managerial performance.

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Herbert Gabora is manager, Human Resources and Research Department, Bell Northern Research, Ottawa. He has had extensive experience in management/organization development as an internal and external consultant in both the public and private sectors.

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