The Ceremonial Side Of Training — Of What Value To First-Line Supervisors?

a case study involving job attitudes and job satisfaction

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In an earlier article Belasco and Trice[1] emphasized that although the benefits from supervisory training in many cases may be suspect, training is worthwhile because of the many unintended "ceremonial" side benefits. After a series of interviews with supervisors, Belasco and Trice reported: *". . . over and over again, supervisors told us, 'I may not have learned anything new, but I feel much better about my job since I went to the training.'"*[2]

Is this merely a condescending expression made for the benefit of the interviewers, or is it an honest feeling of inner satisfaction? Do such things as recognition given for being selected for training, receiving certificates for satisfactory completion of the program and publicizing this accomplishment in the company organ fulfill some of the first-line supervisor's esteem needs — and is this reflected in a measured increase in job satisfaction? If so, management has an effective tool available for rewarding first-line supervisors.

The first-line supervisor in our industrial society has long been a source of perplexity for management in business and industry. The position of first-line supervisor has traditionally been designated as one to which the hourly worker could aspire, but too low in the management hierarchy to interest many persons with college educations. Consequently, through the years management has looked on the first-line supervisor as a "necessary liability" and has devoted relatively little effort to develop him or her as a respected member of the management team.

Production supervisors of today have lost functional authority in such areas as engineering, personnel, production planning and quality control. They have acquired new obligations, however, with every loss. As obligations have increased, authority has diminished — a classic example of multiple responsibilities, limited authority, high accountability, and very obvious visibility when they fail to meet standards set for each responsibility.

University-Sponsored Training Programs

Even with all these perplexities, the supervisor remains invaluable to the organization — the indispensable link between upper management and the work force.

Surfacing evidence suggests that top management is beginning to appreciate the supervisor's quandary and to recognize the position as important and vital to the management team. Specialized management training, often involving enrollment of the supervisor in university-sponsored training activities, is one method being used to show this appreciation. To the first-line supervisor, who has been subjected to constant pressure from both superiors and subordinates, this act of positive recognition is comparable to discovering an oasis in the desert.

Lack of Evaluative Techniques

Training programs present management with a dilemma, however. Accustomed to closely scrutinizing expenditures for a satisfactory return on investment, management finds itself with few tools to answer the question — is the training worthwhile? Blumenfeld and Crane argued that "the evaluation of training is weak because management is (erroneously) reluctant to 'waste time' testing something that it has convinced itself is good."[3]

Perhaps one plausible explanation for this lack of evaluative interest is that many training programs are individually oriented with no specific objectives and are not necessarily part of an overall organizational strategy of change. The major assumption of individually oriented training is that, if the individual supervisor can be equipped with human relations, conceptual and administrative skills through training, then eventually this acquisition of skills will have a favorable impact on the organization's performance and effectiveness.[4]

However, if organizational change is the objective, then individually oriented training would not be effective in producing this change, as Knowles[5] has pointed out. A more effective approach is the Organizational Development (OD) strategy which generates an organizational climate based on social-science principles for diagnosing and coping with inadequacies in interpersonal, group, and intergroup behavior.[6] Training, designed to meet specific measurable objectives as part of this strategy, could be evaluated. Since training in many cases is individually oriented, management has not felt an urgency for an immediate measurement of accomplishment.

Ceremonial Side

Whether or not supervisory training results in improved performance has been, and is, a subject for much more extensive research. Although management may lean intuitively to either side of the paradox, appreciation for the ceremonial side of training seems to be increasing. However, this phenomena would seem to have greater impact if the supervisor were selected to attend a university-sponsored training activity in preference to a company-sponsored, in-house training program. The completion of a university-type training should provide greater recognition, thus enhancing the prestige of the supervisor.

Therefore, it would be of interest to measure the impact of selection for and satisfactory completion of a training activity sponsored by a prestigious university. Specifically, can the "ceremonial side" of training be quantitatively evaluated? Does the satisfactory completion of a training program result in increased job satisfaction?

In an effort to answer these questions, a study was conducted to determine the value of the "ceremonial" aspect of training, using 56 first-line supervisors from one textile company. The objectives of the study were two-fold . . . to determine whether job satisfaction of the supervisor was increased by: (1) the recognition received upon being se-

lected to attend a university-sponsored management development training program; and (2) the satisfactory completion of this training activity. The act of recognition included a personal letter, signed by the general manager and sent to the supervisor at home, notifying the supervisor of his or her selection for university training. An attractive certificate was awarded upon completion of the training program.

Why Job Satisfaction?

Job satisfaction has always been of intense interest to the management of industrial organizations. Most of this interest in the past has been based on the belief that changes in attitude toward the job will be reflected through increased productivity and an improved profit-and-loss statement.

Research soon voided this theory and is appropriately summed up by Smith, Kendall, and Hulin as follows: "We feel that it is unlikely that any simple relationship between satisfaction and productivity will be found generally. No really substantial, reliable, or general correlation between satisfaction and productivity has been established. (See Brayfield & Crockett, 1955; Herzberg, Mausuer, Peterson, and Capwell, 1957; Kahn, 1960; Opsahl and Dunnette, 1966; Vroom, 1964; and Smith and Cranny, 1968, for reviews.)"[7]

Although a comprehensive treatment of job satisfaction and its potential relationship with productivity is beyond the scope of this study, improved attitude toward the job is considered a legitimate goal in itself. Based on the results of a 13-year study by the Center for the Study of Aging and Human Development at Duke University, Dr. Erdman Palmore determined two apparent keys to longevity — satisfaction in one's work and general happiness. Thus, it would appear that job satisfaction is important not only on the job but also in the pattern of general happiness.[8]

The *Job Description Index* (JDI), a measuring instrument developed by Smith, Kendall and Hulin,[9] was selected in this study for its reliability, validity, ease of scoring, acceptance to both the management and employees of the subject company, and its ability to index several dimensions of job satisfaction. This instrument measures satisfaction over five areas of a job: the work itself, the supervision, the coworkers, the pay and the opportunities for promotion on the job.

The Method

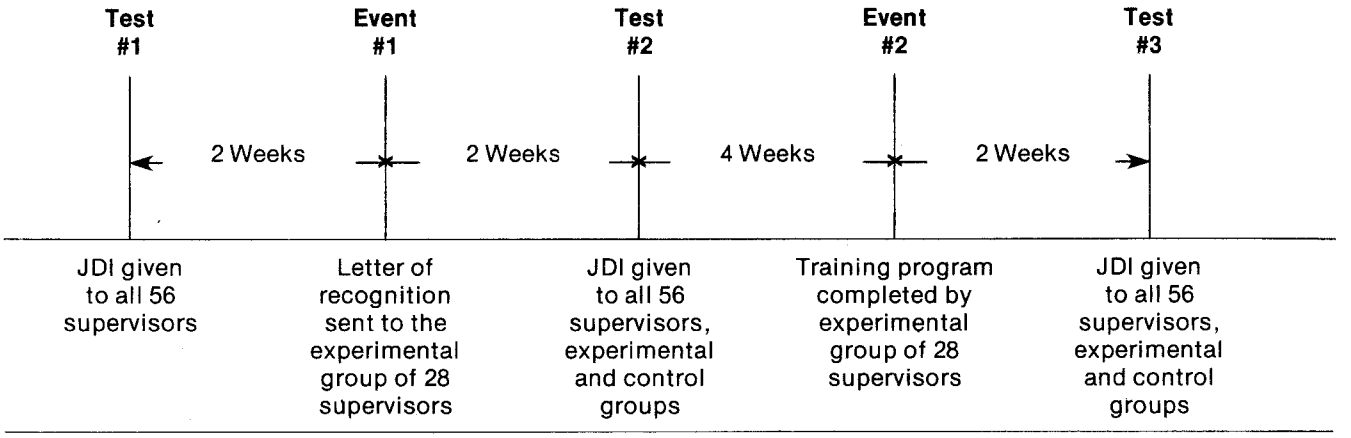
The Pretest-Posttest Control Group design was used in the study. The 56 first-line supervisors were alphabetized and then, using random tables, were divided into an experimental group and a control group. (The company had a total of 68 first-line supervisors; but after eliminating those facing imminent retirement, those on vacation and those temporarily working elsewhere, 56 subjects remained.) Figure 1 depicts the sequence and time frame of the tests and events of the study.

The first objective was to determine whether job satisfaction of the first-line supervisor was increased by the recognition he or she received upon being selected to attend a university-sponsored training activity (Event # 1 in Figure 1). The two-tailed t test for a difference between two independent gain-score means (Test #2 minus Test #1 in Figure 1) was used to determine whether the performance of the experimental group exceeded that of the control group.

Table 1 presents the gain-score means ($\bar{X}$), the standard deviation (SD), and the t values for the major dependent variables. Since the gain scores could be positive or negative, the mean of the gain scores ($\bar{X}$) was shown as positive or negative. The t value was also

FIGURE 1.

THE SEQUENCE AND TIME FRAME OF THE TESTS AND EVENTS OF THE STUDY



shown as positive or negative since the control group gain scores could exceed the experimental group gain scores.

The second objective was to assess any increase in job satisfaction of the first-line supervisor upon satisfactory completion of the training activity (Event #2 in Figure 1). The two-tailed *t* test for a difference between gain-score means (Test #3 minus Test #1 in Figure 1) was used to determine whether the performance of the experimental group exceeded that of the control group.

The Findings

A measure of job satisfaction resulting from the "act of selection" (objective #1) indicated no statistically significant change either in overall job satisfaction or in any component area of work, supervision, promotion, pay and people. These results suggest that the "act of recognition" did not sufficiently influence feelings that would be reflected in significantly improved attitudes toward the job. Although both experimental and control groups experienced an increase in job satisfaction, this increase could probably be attributed to the Hawthorne Effect . . . heightened motivation resulting from being singled out by the organization for special attention and consideration.

In determining whether job satisfaction improved upon the satisfactory completion of a university-sponsored training program, again no statistically significant improvement resulted from the training. However, overall job satisfaction increased substantially as reflected in the *t* value of +1.09 with the greatest increase in the component areas of supervision (+1.63) and promotion (+1.86).

One might conclude that completing the training program increased the supervisor's appreciation for his or her position and was expressed as an improvement in the supervision component of the JDI. These same supervisors, when compared with the control group, were much more satisfied with their promotional chances (+1.86) but much less satisfied with their pay (-1.27). Again, realization of job importance could have resulted in a better feeling toward the company regarding opportunities for advancement; yet, this new-found sense of prestige and importance also gave rise to the feeling that they were underpaid for these responsibilities.

The results of this study indicated that merely being selected for university training did not sufficiently influence job attitudes to reflect significantly improved job satisfaction. On the other hand, the satisfactory completion of the training program did result in improved job satisfaction, with improved attitudes in the areas of promotional chances and supervision.

In this study the training program, although conducted by university faculty, was held at the company location. If this same experimental group of supervisors had been selected to attend a week-long training activity on a university campus, the recognition impact of the "act of selection" may have been reflected in a greater degree of improvement in job satisfaction. Upon returning to the job after satisfactorily completing the training program, the supervisor may have possessed a greater degree of self-confidence, self-importance, and pride that should result in improved job satisfaction or possibly in a higher measurement of self-esteem. USE READER SERVICE CARD

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