

Industrial Training In Japan

A Brief Look at Present Status

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In their efforts to understand the success of postwar Japanese industry, many American businessmen have investigated Japanese scientific advances, financing methods, and operating procedures. Rarely have they delved into the industrial training procedures or made an attempt to understand the problems of such training in Japan. The rapid increase in awareness for the need for industrial training is, perhaps, best stated in the following quotation: "Even though there had been some effort in industrial training before World War II, it has been only in recent years that the systematic undertakings of industrial training have become widespread."¹

Japanese industry has been fostered and protected by the national government, and activities to develop and to train various industrial personnel have been no exception. Industrial training in Japan has been under the constant influence of government industrial policy.

History

Under Emperor Meiji, the popular ruler who led Japan from feudalism into the modern world, the government promulgated laws pertaining to the establishment of various technical schools in order to develop highly qualified technical experts. In 1890, Japanese industry moved into what has been termed the "assimilation and creation" era.² During this period, great efforts were made to develop middle grade technicians, largely by increasing the number of technical high schools, which rose from nine to thirty-one during the decade between 1895 and 1905.³ After the Russo-Japanese War, the Japanese economy showed an expansion which was reflected in both the quantity and quality of technical education.

Throughout the Manchurian War, the Sino-Japanese War and World War II, the economy of Japan moved in the direction of heavy industry. Technical experts and a skilled work force were

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1. Japanese Industrial Training Productivity Team, "Present Status of Industrial Training in Japan," Japanese Production Center, March 22, 1957, p. 1.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

needed for such fields as mechanics, electricity, applied chemistry, mining, metallurgy, shipbuilding, and aircraft. Various universities, colleges and technical schools were organized and expanded to meet the need for technical experts and skilled workers. In order to develop and train the managerial talent, universities and colleges were established during the latter part of the Meiji Era (the early 1900's). Within each of the enterprises, however, systematic training of supervisors and managerial staffs was virtually nonexistent. The management training was entirely dependent upon informal job rotation, job assignment and unsystematic job coaching.⁴

A significant aspect of the intra-enterprise education was what may be called mental development, whereby attempts were made to influence attitude according to the principles of Shintoism, Nationalism and Fascism. The extreme emphasis upon these principles was largely a function of the traditional family structure of Japanese communities and of the imperial ideology being promulgated by the increasingly-powerful military faction.

After World War II, the economy of Japan collapsed. With its recovery came a tremendous importation of technology from foreign countries, especially the United States. In the process of introducing the new technology, the so-called "Rationalization" movement appeared to be advocated throughout Japan, and the movement seemed to have reached its climax around 1952 or 1953. Also during the Occupation, American administrators introduced a training program

developed by Bell Telephone Company.⁵ Viewed from the perspective of industrial training, it is significant that the introduction of various packaged courses of industrial training such as Training Within Industry (TWI) and Management Training Program (MTP) corresponded to the introduction of the new technology from abroad.

Present Status

Today large Japanese industrial concerns are keenly interested in industrial training. In most companies, however, there appears to be no independent training department, such as is often found in American firms. The training function is usually assigned to either the personnel or industrial relations department. Accordingly the term "training" seldom appears in the title of those who head the training staff branch. In view of the fact that more than half of those who head the training staff branch in American industry have the title of training director or training supervisor, the training staff branch in Japan appears to be less independent than its American counterpart.⁶

In the United States, approximately half of the training staffs are recruited from those who have engaged in education or related activities, many of them with actual public or private school teaching experience. In Japan, however, very few training staff members have previously been involved in these fields. One probable cause for this fact is that most management personnel in Japanese industry are recruited directly from college. They receive a safe, secure life-

4. *Ibid.*, p. 3.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 14.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 6.

time position with the almost inevitable, although slow, promotional opportunities, and with little, if any, chance to utilize their experience in obtaining equivalent or better positions. For the same reasons that these men would have extreme difficulty in shifting out of their position, it is unusual in Japan to have another person, such as a schoolteacher, attempt successfully to move into a vacant job slot, except at the very bottom of the job hierarchy.

Most individuals now in training positions spent their college years studying economics, commerce, or law; few have majored in engineering, education, or any of the arts or sciences.

Training Philosophy

In many ways, the philosophy that dominates Japanese commerce produces a different set of goals for the training director. For example, he usually is expected to emphasize team spirit and company loyalty rather than individual excellence.⁷ Also, Japanese factories draw a relatively large portion of their managerial personnel from highly educated, urban, middle and upper class families, and many of their workers from lesser educated, rural, lower class families. Therefore, the lack of adequate understanding each group has for the other is greater than in the United States where social mobility has been more common, thus forcing the Japanese training director into a position of having to translate the ideas of one group into the

language of the other. However, with increased affluence and higher education readily available, more and more Japanese are using university degrees to move from the working class to the managerial class.

Formalized industrial training was fostered by the United States. Experience in World War II emphasized the value of such programs, and the Japanese contacts with American methods during the Occupation period and thereafter did much to bring their attention to such programs. However, these programs were usually evolved in a Western framework, based on incentives found in the United States. Unless adequately modified, to allow for differences in values and motivations, the training is ineffectual and may actually produce a negative reaction.

In Japan, several factors have contributed to keeping the proportion of successful high school graduates to a much lower level than in the United States. Economic problems, strong academic competition, and inadequate counseling all contribute to many school dropouts. Because so many enter the work force with a ninth-grade education and limited skills, industrial training can play a relatively more meaningful role in the lives of the average Japanese than his American counterpart. Fortunately, Japanese management takes its role seriously and extends both technical training and general education to its workers.

7. Management Training (MTP) was originally developed by the United States Air Force, Far East, for the training of Japanese employees of supervisory category in the United State military installations. It was later modified to the specific needs of Japanese industry. Of Japanese companies which transact their corporate shares in the open market, 70 per cent are reported to have installed this type of program. From Middle Management Development Training Study Team, "Middle Management Development in Japan," Japanese Production Center, 1960.