

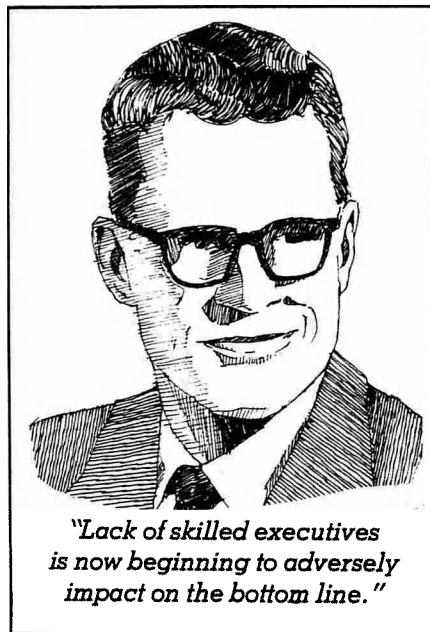
"IF SEVERAL CHANGES DO NOT OCCUR, OBSOLESCENCE WILL BE A CHALLENGE FOR EVERYONE WHO CURRENTLY HAS ANYTHING TO DO WITH EXECUTIVE EDUCATION."

EDUCATING THE EXECUTIVE IN THE FUTURE

BY WALTER
R. MAHLER

"Never has so much been spent with so little evidence of value." This was a conclusion one could draw from an intensive study of executive education. This study was reported by Kenneth Andrews in 1966. What has happened since? Amazingly little! The same schools are using the same curriculum, in the same setting, and on the same schedule. This can be verified by comparing *Bricker's Directory* for a 10-year period. Only two changes have occurred. A new generation of professors is in front of the class and a new generation of participants is in its seats.

Andrews was hard pressed to prove executive education was of much value. He asked for major changes to be made by educational institutions and by business and industry. A review of the current situation reveals that his plea for change has gone unanswered. Educational institutions have made minimal changes. Why should they? The customer still enrolls the expected number of partici-



pants each year.

Business organizations still arrive at the annual need to decide upon participants in a near state of desperation. No one knows for sure who needs what type of education. A list of names finally appears. The top names are excluded because the individuals can't be spared. Those who can be spared are selected and notified. Future

participants receive their notification with delight. Not delight with the opportunity to learn, but delight because they have been anointed.

Amazingly, just as in Andrew's study done over two decades ago, current participants still rate their new-found friends as one of the most important benefits from the advanced educational program. One would think this noneducational outcome would make professors paranoid. But it doesn't. The other basic benefit still reported is that of "broadening."

Bottom Line Impact

Let me be bold enough to suggest that major changes are occurring and more will occur in executive education during the next decade. Necessity has been credited with being the handmaiden of invention. So it will be for executive education in the future. Business and industry leaders now recognize that they must have skilled executives at all levels. All the well-known social and economic trends make the executive's job more complex, more dif-

ficult and more critical. Lack of skilled executives is now beginning to adversely impact on the bottom line. It doesn't take a seer to predict that top management will begin to set new and higher expectations on executive education as one response.

Please pardon a personal reference, but our experience of the last five years is, we feel, a harbinger of the future. Let me describe, briefly, the major parameters of our *Advanced Management Skills Program for General Managers*. The Program parameters are:

— Duration of eight weeks, scheduled on a quarterly basis.

— Emphasis upon developing skills a general manager can use. Thirty-four specific skills have been identified as relevant to general managers.

— Enrollment is limited to general managers, to get a desired homogeneity.

— One program leader is responsible for an entire week's program.

— The number of participants is limited to no more than 20 to permit development of skills.

— Participants are expected to plan skill application projects, complete them and report back to other participants, on a quarterly basis. Over 30 specific skills are covered in the eight-week program. In effect, they use their own organization as a "real-time case."

— Data is gathered initially, at the end of the first year and at the end of the second year. The data facilitates participants identifying specific skill strengths and skill weaknesses and undertaking an individualized educational experience.

— The quarterly sessions are held at various locations. Participants pay as much in travel as in tuition fees. And they report they are glad to do it so they don't have to be away from their work more than a week at a time.

Again, the personal reference on the support the Program has received to date is provided only to demonstrate that entirely new approaches to executive education are possible. The initial Program started in March, 1973. A new pro-

gram is initiated each fall and each spring. As of this date, seven groups have completed and four are in process. Average enrollment has been 15. Dropouts average two per group, usually because of a change in organization. Interestingly, participants of education programs often lament that their bosses should be in attendance. In the last year, we have had the actual enrollment of superiors occurring with increased frequency.

A historical complaint of long standing is that participants in executive education don't change as a result of their exposure. We have data, admittedly on a nonsystematic basis, that many participants have changed. This change is reported by superiors, by peers and by subordinates. It is also true that some participants make little or no changes in their managerial habits.

New Educational Approaches

Let's consider another type of evidence that new educational approaches may be forthcoming. Recently, a general manager of a

middle-sized company called me. He said, "I have been thinking about my own education. I have identified four specific needs. I need to know improved marketing skills. I need organization planning skills. I need to improve my long-term planning abilities and I need to be able to select executives much more skillfully."

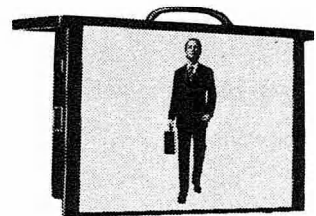
I advised him that there was no one program which would come close to meeting his needs. He would have to invest in several. The thing that amazed me was that this type of inquiry was not promoted by some sophisticated staff person. Here was an astute executive demanding specific results from his investment in an educational effort. We see frequent evidence of a more sophisticated "customer" setting explicit expectations for the educational investment.

I recently sat in on a conference of top personnel executives of major companies. They were seriously questioning their entire advanced executive educational invest-

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ment. They were beginning to see a need for certain educational experiences at each stage in an individual's career. Functional managers were seen as needing one thing, general managers were seen as needing something in addition, group officers were seen as having unique needs. The institutional leaders at the top were seen as having even more unique needs. They began to differentiate between having executives exposed to the theory of management and having them improve their skills of managing. They were, in effect, beginning to think of a "systems" approach. The needs of each stage would need to be met by specially tailored education programs.

Let me polish the crystal ball on the future of executive education:

1. Executive education will gain in popularity. Business and industry and nonprofit organizations will budget to spend more money on executive education in the future.

2. The "customers" will begin to exert influence on the design of

educational process. They will specify the results they expect. No longer will mere attendance be accepted as being of consequence.

3. Historically, educational programs have been designed to make it easy for the educational institution (large classes, continuous weeks of instruction, heterogeneity of participants, etc.). In the future, much greater attention will be given to adapting educational programs to the needs of a homogeneous group of "students." What a novel trend! Both educators and "students" will appreciate this trend.

4. Reliance upon a single educational experience once during a career will give way to periodic participation in an educational experience pertinent to a given stage in an executive's career.

5. Homogeneity has always been greatly appreciated by instructors. Just try giving a marketing course to executives from companies in such diverse fields as service, product or processing. Try giving a truly advanced program with a

wide mixture of sophistication on the part of the students. We will see much more homogeneity in the future. This is primarily a matter of courage and promotional effort on the part of the educational institution.

6. I would estimate that 95 per cent of all current educational efforts would be accounted for by either case studies or lectures. Imagine that. No significant change in methodology in over two decades. This will slowly give way. We have here a need, to use a computer analogy, to spend much more money on the "software" side of the process. This is being recognized by all concerned. Collaborative approaches, such as those of trade associations, will provide substantial financial support for the innovation which will overcome the historical reliance on cases and lectures.

7. More executives will be taught by other executives. This is beginning to happen now on a small scale. It will occur in two ways. Executives will retire early

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to teach. Larger organizations will begin to use their current executives periodically as instructors.

8. The educational process will become much more individualized. The individual executive will take a more active part in the initial decision to "partake"; the executive's individual needs will influence the educational process. This will mean the individual will feel a much keener personal interest in learning and will share the responsibility for learning.

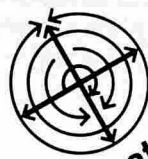
9. Much more attention will be given to "learning" different cultures. Non-U.S. companies, in increasing numbers, are struggling with the cultural problems of doing business in this country. U.S. companies have, of course, been struggling over the same problems for some time. This basic need, which is widespread and often, acute, will be met, in part, by education in the future.

If only a portion of the above changes occur, obsolescence will be a challenge for everyone who currently has anything to do with executive education. Professor John Mee of the University of Indiana has quipped that each of us, both educator and executive, are in a footrace with obsolescence. The best we can hope for is a photo-finish.

REFERENCES

1. Andrews, Kenneth R., *The Effectiveness of University Management Development Programs*, Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, 1966.
2. *Bricker's Directory of University-Sponsored Executive Development Programs* (Annual Edition prepared since 1969).

Walter R. Mahler is president of Mahler Associates. Mahler Associates has had two decades of experience in executive development, management development, organization planning, and personnel administration. The company has worked with many of the large companies in the Fortune 500 as well as with medium-sized and smaller organizations. Prior to establishing his own organization, Dr. Mahler served as a consultant for seven years to The Psychological Corp. His experience includes several years in industry, in retailing, and in government work.



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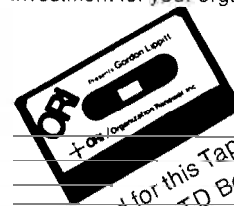
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