

. . . INADEQUATE COMPETENCIES IN DEALING WITH PEOPLE ON THE JOB CAN RESULT IN WASTED OR INSUFFICIENT USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES!

INCREASING MANAGERIAL EFFECTIVENESS

BY
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Billions of dollars are spent annually on management training and management development programs, yet most of the evaluations of such efforts have failed to show that improved managerial effectiveness has resulted. Most appraisals of management training indicate that the transfer of learning is difficult to either achieve or sustain.¹ One documented case found that training actually produced a negative effect on the performance of managers and supervisors when they returned to work.² They re-entered a work environment where their peers and bosses possessed very different values from those taught in the training program. The conflict which resulted caused many of those trained to eventually leave the company.

Training programs must bridge the gap between what may be taught, practiced or discovered in the classroom and what is applied, developed and utilized on the job. This is difficult to do because par-

ticipants in a training program must return to a work place where people are unaware of personal changes which may have taken place. Furthermore, the culture and norms of a work place may be so antithetical to the perspective acquired in a training program that a transfer of learning will ultimately be thwarted.

Providing the conditions for the maximum transfer of training is no easy task. But they are necessary in order to realize an adequate payback for the time and dollar investment in training. Just as inadequate competencies in handling technical aspects of the work situation can result in misused equipment and lowered efficiency, inadequate competencies in dealing with people on the job can result in wasted or insufficient use of human resources!

To improve the likelihood that training will be transferred to on-the-job situations, five design criteria will be presented. Before they are discussed, however, it is important for someone planning a management training program to recognize and include those in-

redients which will ultimately make a difference in managerial performance and effectiveness. It is just as important to know *what* competencies to develop as it is to know *how* to develop them.

What Do Managers Do?

Ever since Henry Mintzberg wrote *The Nature of Managerial Work*,³ an increasing number of observers and practitioners of management have been much less willing to say that managers simply plan, organize, coordinate, and control. In fact, these four words seem to describe certain vague objectives of management more than they delineate what managers do.

Recent research efforts have described some of the personal and interpersonal competencies which, it is maintained, any truly useful managerial training program must emphasize. Since managerial effectiveness is dependent upon certain orientations,⁴ values,⁵ attitudes,⁶ motives,⁷ and interpersonal skills,⁸ these ought to form the bulk of the program curriculum.

In addition, a capstone compe-

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tency which all managers need to acquire is the ability to accurately diagnose the situations in which they find themselves.⁹ This means that training designs must include opportunities for participants to evaluate and assess their current situation in order for them to see the relevance of training-induced competencies back on the job. Seminars and workshops which do not provide such opportunities cannot hope for transference to work situations.¹⁰

The objective of most management training is to change attitudes and behavior in such a way that observable changes occur outside of the learning environment. The test of the program value is not limited to participant insight and understanding. None of the traditional teaching methods of management training (lectures, role-plays, simulations, case studies, etc.) alone come to grips with the essential criterion of training effectiveness: the issue of transference. Information, skills practice and self-awareness by themselves are not enough to insure that participants will do things differently when they return to work.

To meet the challenge of the transfer of training, five design criteria are proposed which deal with the most difficult problems encountered in competence acquisition and its on-the-job application. In order to maximize learning and transfer, management development programs should:

1. Represent an explicit managerial philosophy
2. Provide some type of feedback to participants on how others see their managerial style
3. Focus on convincing (why) as much as on practicing (how to)
4. Include opportunities to eval-

uate and solve real problems

5. Structure some time for focused reflection

Managerial Philosophy

Most managers shy away from talking philosophically. They would rather be pragmatic and focus on specific problems. Yet, because they do not have a common understanding of what is important and what methods are available for realizing these priorities they often work at cross-purposes.¹¹ When managers function in an organization that does not possess a consistent managerial philosophy, their goals and objectives must remain similarly imprecise. Without such a philosophical perspective, moreover, those in charge of management training lack the ability to utilize the most common model of change and development: the disparity model.¹²

The disparity model is based on the notion that a change strategy must create a recognition of the difference between a current condition and an ideal state. Without an ideal state, an avowed managerial philosophy, this tool is unavailable. For in the absence of such a philosophy, there is a tendency for participants in training workshops to disregard much of the presented material as irrelevant, or inappropriate to their own particular on-the-job situation. "It is good material," they may say, "but it doesn't fit my own situation."

If a managerial philosophy has been espoused and delineated, it is possible to hold it up to seminar participants as the recognized ideal in the organization. It thereby increases the likelihood of change since it supplements the necessary cognitive base for a change in behavior,¹³ with an overall rationale. In addition, the work environment will legitimize

the utilization of these competencies acquired in training when they are consistent with the recognized ideal.

Feedback from Others

There are a variety of data-gathering instruments that can help managers get feedback from those with whom they work about their own performance, style or behavior. These instruments can be circulated to people who work with managers, and then tabulated and summarized before being given back to them. This feedback is often the catalyst which managers need in order to decide to change. It is intrinsic to competence acquisition because it identifies any current disparities between the overall managerial philosophy and current operation procedures.

In the process of a manager improving his or her own performance, probably no skill is more important than being able to obtain accurate feedback from others. Being able to obtain such information requires special knowledge and skills. Training programs can both model the feedback process and elicit this information for participants by using some type of feedback instrument. Such information can thereby provide the means for participants to identify how their behavior affects other people and decide upon personal changes.

Too often those who conduct management training programs believe that their challenge is to teach managers *how to* apply the various skills which characterize effective managers. Although this aspect is an important training ingredient, it is incomplete by itself. For unless people are convinced that the rationale behind a concept or skill is valid, they will be disinterested in mastering competency in its use.

The most widespread barrier to improved operations or increased productivity in almost every organization is convincing people that something is important and worth doing and that it is their job to do it. This applies to managers as well as to others in the organization. What this means is that trainers must do more than explain a procedure and allow participants to practice a skill. They must also convince participants of the utility of acquiring competency in various areas.

Evaluate and Solve Problems

Once a managerial philosophy has been clearly delineated, feedback on managerial performance obtained, and the importance of providing participants with a rationale for the development of each competency recognized, it is possible to utilize a learning method which capitalizes on the peculiar norms and culture of the organization. This learning process is one which includes developing diagnostic capabilities by resolving real

problems instead of manufactured ones. In this way, learning results when a participant is better able to assess the implications of the problems and issues which confront him or her and deal with them in an appropriate manner.

This approach of evaluating present actions with the aid of some type of feedback and then solving specific problems based on that data, is an important curriculum input in any training design. It shifts the objective of a training seminar from merely providing either information or skills or self-awareness, to providing opportunities to evaluate and solve problems. Cases, role-plays and structured experiences can all be utilized as long as each gives the participants an opportunity to evaluate a situation that has some relevance to them and then resolve some aggravated problem which is presented in the material. The use of cases, business games and other simulations contributes to the development of managerial skills

only to the extent that they cast the participant in the role of a responsible manager. Instead of simply illustrating a point, to be effective they must also allow the participant to model effective managerial behavior.

This way, teachers and learners are observers of immediate experiences which they can jointly address. The teacher's role in this approach is that of a facilitator of a learning process that is largely self-directed. He or she provides observational schemes and perspectives from which to evaluate perspectives. He or she stands ready with alternative theories and concepts as the participant attempts to assimilate observations into personal views of the way things happen. But they do not decide for the participant. They recognize that someone does not change because he or she is told to, but because that person decides to.

This type of training design emphasizes a contingency approach in managerial development. Basic to contingency theory is the ability of a manager to accurately assess the constraints inherent in the various situations one faces and on that basis formulate an appropriate strategy. Since opportunities are provided in this design for managers to engage in such activities, the entire design models a contingency approach to managing.

Reflection

One other key element is important in order to maximize learning and increase its transfer. This is to provide participants with the opportunity to reflect on experiences in the training program and on that basis decide what they intend to do differently. Budgeted time for reflection is critical to the transfer of learning. It is a long-accepted educational axiom that learning takes place only after a student takes the time to reflect on the content of the material that has been presented.¹⁴ Structuring time to reflect and fit new competencies into routine habits can thereby greatly facilitate learning and changed behavior.

The nature of the learning process is such that without the reflective examination of experience,

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people simply do not acquire new competencies. Reflection is a key to both creativity and analysis and can be enhanced in a training seminar by legitimizing its use. This can be done by requiring participants to record both new learnings and on-the-job applications of the information, skills, or awareness acquired as well as how they intend to apply new competencies when they return to work.

Recognizing the type of competencies which managers must develop and how these can be maximized in the learning environment are certainly important in preparing for a management training seminar. Each of the five design criteria which has been presented and described could greatly contribute to training effectiveness as well. Each describes activities which a trainer can arrange in order to increase the likelihood of competence acquisition and application. Managing this learning process well is not easy, but it can determine whether or not a transfer of training actually occurs.

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