

Motion Pictures In Management Development

Report on a Study of Use of Films by Los Angeles Area Training Directors

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A gap in understanding exists between the producers of management development motion pictures and the training directors who use the films in their training program. This gap in understanding is one general result which emerged from our recent study of the use of motion pictures in management development programs. Because the motion picture is potentially a powerful training tool, this study set out to find better answers to questions such as:

1. How are motion pictures used in the training program?
2. In what areas do training directors want films?

3. How are films used at different management levels?
4. What are training directors' major criticisms of motion pictures?
5. How could training directors help make a film more effective in their training program?

To answer these questions a team of three UCLA Business Administration students undertook interviews with film producers and training directors and conducted a questionnaire survey of training directors in the Los Angeles area. Thirty-five people closely connected with management development programs were interviewed, and 74 ques-

The authors did this study while seniors at UCLA. They were members of an experimental class in The Business School—Integrated Management—an approach to teaching the functions of business by utilizing new and different techniques such as team projects, simulation and sensitivity training. It was in this atmosphere of allowing the class members more freedom in planning and participation of activities that Messrs. Bobele, Maher and Ferl did this semester project. The study was based on a questionnaire sent to the Los Angeles Chapter of the ASTD (160 mailed and 74 returned), on interviews with 35 people concerned with management development, training and the making of motion pictures for management development, and on personal reading on the subject matter. This article is a summary of the study of the use of motion pictures in management development. At the conclusion of the semester, all three authors received a Bachelor of Science degree from UCLA. Presently Messrs. Ferl and Maher are in the U. S. Army, and Mr. Bobele is working on his Ph.D. in Behavioral Science at UCLA.

tionnaires were returned. On the basis of these findings, we offer the following conclusions about the use of motion pictures in management development programs.

HOW ARE MOTION PICTURES USED IN TRAINING PROGRAMS?

52% of the training directors use films to stimulate thought. The second most frequent use of films was to introduce a subject area. 32% of the training directors mentioned this as a use of films. A third use of films was to summarize topics. 10% of the training directors stated this as a use of films. Training directors felt that films can be used to emphasize the subject, present a case situation, and to act as a change-of-pace in the learning stimuli.

HOW DIFFICULT IS IT FOR TRAINING DIRECTORS TO OBTAIN INFORMATION OF FILMS AND PROCURE FILMS?

Very easy to obtain	12.1%
Relatively easy to obtain	30.3%
No particular problem	43.9%
Difficult	10.6%
Very difficult	3.0%

This shows that training directors find no particular problem in obtaining desired films. The three most common sources of information on these films are catalogues, direct-mail, and word-of-mouth.

IN WHAT AREAS DO TRAINING DIRECTORS WANT FILMS?

Training directors said in interviews and in the questionnaire survey that they want films in the areas of (1) human relations (superior-subordinate relations), (2) personnel appraisal and interview, (3) communications, and (4) management principles such as planning, organizing, and controlling.

WHAT DO TRAINING DIRECTORS FEEL ARE DISADVANTAGES OF USING FILMS IN THEIR PROGRAMS?

Training directors felt that the major disadvantage of using films in their programs is the "Hollywood" or entertainment stigma which trainees may associate with films. Many training directors stated that this entertainment stigma may dominate the trainee's attitude and prevent him from becoming involved in the film material from a learning standpoint.

HOW DO TRAINING DIRECTORS DETERMINE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FILMS?

Training directors felt that there is no one set of criteria for measuring the effectiveness of a film, rather that criteria are valid only in terms of the training directors' purpose in showing the film. Some of the more frequently mentioned criteria stated by training directors include:

1. Was the film situation meaningful enough to cause the viewer to relate himself or his situation to the film?
2. Was the film short and concise?
3. Did the film match the intelligence level of the trainees—neither insult the intelligence level of the trainee by being elementary in approach nor appear overly intellectual?

IN AREAS WHERE TRAINING DIRECTORS DON'T USE FILMS, WHAT TEACHING TECHNIQUES DO THEY TYPICALLY USE?

The teaching technique used in areas taught without films by the greatest number of respondents was discussion. Training directors replied that the discussion technique is usually integrated with some other technique such as case

method or role playing. The lecture, case method, and role playing were the other three most common teaching techniques according to the training directors.

HOW ARE FILMS USED AT DIFFERENT MANAGEMENT LEVELS?

Training directors indicated in interviews and in questionnaires that they use films far more at the supervisory level. The reasons for this are (1) more training takes place at this level and (2) the nature of the subject matter lends itself better to film since the subject matter is primarily introductory, and therefore not highly complex. Training directors stated that their teaching of middle and top management is concerned more with the men learning through experience and self-development; therefore, motion pictures are not greatly used at these levels.

WHAT ARE THE TRAINING DIRECTORS' MAJOR CRITICISMS OF MOTION PICTURES?

Training directors believed that the major weaknesses in films are the generality of approach of the subject matter, the unrealistic situations presented in the films, and the cost of films.

Concerning the generality of approach, training directors stated that the subject matter of many films is so wide that it is not applicable to their firm's particular industry or their particular method of presenting the subject matter. On commenting upon the unrealistic situations as a weakness of films, training directors expressed two major views: (1) that the illustrative situations were overly simplified so that the film does not present life in the office or factory as it actually occurs, (2) that the

personalities in the films are too stereotyped, i.e., the "boss," the "executive," the "foreman," etc. Pertaining to the third major weakness of cost, training directors asserted that the high purchase price of films eliminates the possibility of some firms (especially the smaller ones) having a library of films. This necessitates many firms borrowing or renting films. Also there is the implicit cost of idle manpower viewing the film.

Other weaknesses of films mentioned by training directors are (1) films are too long, causing boredom and distraction, (2) there is a problem of maintaining the film and the needed equipment, (3) some films are outdated, showing styles of dress which may act as a barrier to the trainees identifying with the film situation, (4) some human relations films leave the trainee with the impression that "this is the rule" or the "one right way" to handle the situation.

HOW COULD MOTION PICTURE PRODUCERS IMPROVE FILMS?

Producing films with a more intelligent audience in mind is one way in which motion picture producers could improve films. With a more sophisticated audience in mind, the motion picture producer could create a more thought-provoking atmosphere and eliminate "talking down" to people.

A second improvement which training directors desired was for film producers to create more thought-provoking situations rather than simply showing the "right way" to handle a management situation.

A third suggested improvement would be for film producers to create more realistic situations, eliminating stereotyped behavior. Using actual plant of-



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fices and supervisors, aids the trainee in relating the film's situation to his actual situation.

A technical improvement for better films would be for the producers to make shorter films (10-15 minutes) to overcome possible boredom and offer time for discussion of the film.

Training directors mentioned preferences for more films in the areas of human relations, personnel appraisal, communications and organizing; so the motion picture producer should consider making improved films in these desired areas.

HOW COULD THE TRAINING DIRECTOR HELP MAKE A FILM MORE EFFECTIVE IN HIS TRAINING PROGRAM?

The effectiveness of management development motion pictures depends greatly upon the proper incorporation of the film into the management development program. The training director can increase the effectiveness of films and make the concepts and situations of the film more meaningful to the trainee by employing a variety of techniques.

One such technique would be for the training director to discuss the film beforehand with the trainees, offering suggestions as to what to look for in the film situation. Another technique would be for the training director to propose certain questions or situations for the trainee to look for in the film, attempting to get the trainee to relate the film situation to his working situation. A third technique to improve incorporation of the film to the program would be for the training director to stop the projector and have the training group speculate on future events in the film.

The training director's leading a discussion after the film is invaluable in formalizing the concepts of the film, relating particular company problems to the film, and as a means of stimulating the trainee to get a reinforcement of the specific area in the training program.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

From our interviews with a sampling of motion picture producers and training directors, we see the following implications if the motion picture media is to be more effective.

1. Producers should consider elevating the level of sophistication of films.
2. Producers should attempt to present more thought-provoking and realistic situations.
3. Producers should make a more extensive survey of the target audience to find out what is needed and what method of presentation would be most effective.
4. Training directors need to have more foresight in incorporating the film into the management development program to increase the effectiveness of the learnings to the trainees.
5. More studies are needed to find a means of closing the gap in the lack of understanding between the motion picture producer and training director who uses the film in training programs. A channel of communication is needed to overcome the communication block and relate the needs of the training director to the desires of the film producer.

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