Developments in Business Simulation & Experiential Exercises, Volume 10, 1983

ROLE-PLAYING BASED ON VIDEO-TAPE SCENARIOS; AN APPLICATION OF MODELLING TO BUILDING SUPERVISORY SKILLS

James C. Faltot, University of Delaware
John R. Ogilvie, University of Delaware

ABSTRACT

Waggener [51 has presented an argument for creating cases based on *"live"* scenarios. This article proposes taking this approach even further. Videotape scenarios were created and played to participants. They then role-played their own solutions to the problems presented in the simulation. The participants themselves were video-taped during their role plays and performance feedback was given. They then viewed a role model provide a recommended solution. This learning was then applied to the next scenario. Although developed for an industrial training program, applications for classroom instruction are offered.

INTRODUCTION

A common complaint aired at both supervisory training programs and classroom instruction is that they are too abstract, dealing with theoretical constructs and in no way related to the issues one faces in the "real' world. In response to this criticism a supervisory training program was designed using skill-building (not conceptual understanding) as its primary objective. Programs which simply present information are based on the belief that new information will change attitudes which in turn will produce a behavioral change. Note that the ultimate target for change is on-the-job behaviors. However, this actual transfer rarely takes place. It breaks down due to the new information not producing an attitude change or because the new attitude falls to produce behavioral change. The reasons for these breakdowns are numerous, one major one being a lack of reinforcement on-the-job for trying these new behaviors.

The attitude-behavior link has been studied and researched, often producing conflicting conclusions. The radical behaviorist Darryl Bem [2] has suggested that behavioral change precedes attitudinal change. This belief that behavior causes attitudes formed the core of the program. Rather than discuss the importance of exhibiting certain supervisory behaviors, the focus of the program was on participants actually producing these behaviors.

LEARNING MODEL

The program was designed using the applied learning model of Goldstein and Sorcher [3]. It should be noted that many of the principles used in this model are derived from the work of Bandura [1]. There are four major components to the model:

1. Modeling--Most of us learn by observing others perform tasks. In order for this to be effective the observer must be attentive, rehearse the behavior through mental practice, and then repeat what he/she has observed.

2. Role playing--Practicing what one has observed is critical. Practicing is more effective when it is done voluntarily, involves risk taking, allows for improvisation, is done publicly and includes the opportunity for feedback.

3. Social reinforcement--Feedback from others is needed to first, build a supportive climate and second, to point out behaviors that the participant is engaging in and may not be aware of, or else, behaviors the participant may be omitting.

4. Transfer of learning--In order to increase the chances that participants will carry over behaviors to the job several conditions need to be met. They need some general principles to be able to apply. That is, the practice obtained during role playing can't be too specific, however, at the same time the situations used in the role plays must be relevant and applicable to the participants' work environment. In addition, mechanisms need to be developed to assure feedback is on-going.

SUPERVISORY SCENARIOS

Four video-taped scenarios were constructed based on input provided by the client organization. This assured that the situations would be relevant to the participants. It should be noted that the client paid for the development and production of the tapes and the University was able to retain copies of the tapes which could be used later in classroom instruction. Scripts were written, actors were hired (University students, including theatre majors were used--it is important not to use employees of the client company in the tapes). Filming was done in the University's television studio. Technical assistance was provided by the Instructional Resource Center. Listed below are brief outlines of the four scenarios.

(1) "Orientation Session": Since this is a fairly non-threatening situation, it was used as a warm-up role play. It Involved greeting a new employee on his first day on the job. Issues included welcoming the employee, putting him at ease, providing information, answering questions, expressing confidence in his ability to do the job and an interest in helping him to succeed.

(2) "Feedback Session': Here the supervisor is asked to handle a performance problem. The critical issues facing supervisor are determining why a good employee's performance has deteriorated, working with the employee to determine a solution and establishing a follow-up program.

(3) "The Absentee" The supervisor is confronted with an employee who fails to report for a temporary assignment to do a different job. The supervisor looks bad in the eyes of his own boss when the employee fails to report. Major issues includes self examination of how the supervisor contributed to the situation, disciplining the employee and building commitment in order to prevent a reoccurrence of the problem.

(4) "The Showboater": In this situation the supervisor is asked to deal with an "agitator." Issues include

group dynamics, authority, discipline and conflict resolution.

TRAINING SESSIONS

The basic objectives of the sessions were to train the participants in how to deal with a variety of supervisory situations and specifically how to (1) focus in on problems, not on the employees themselves, (2) avoid pushing for immediate solutions, unless warranted, (3) legitimize their own feelings to include how to delay their emotional responses to those feelings and (4) set up follow-up actions and review progress.

Participants were first line supervisors and department managers (each attended different sessions) at an aviation company. The training took place during two four hour sessions. Each training group had approximately a dozen participants.

After explaining the objectives of the program and how the applied learning model would be used to accomplish those objectives, participants engaged in a listening exercise [4]. This was done to get every one involved and comfortable with the process. All participants role-played this exercise simultaneously in order to prevent focusing in on any individuals during the first activity. Also, it should be mentioned that the participants had, prior to this experience, been exposed to conceptual material in a traditional management development program.

Generally speaking, two hours were devoted to each of the taped scenarios. Each tape would be shown to the participants and stopped at a critical point in the action. For example, in the Feedback Session the tape was stopped after the employee, having become very defensive, says "Just forget it!" The trainer would then lead a group discussion in which the situation was analyzed focusing in on how the situation developed, what actions need to be taken and how they could be taken. Critical points were written on a flip chart and made available to the participants during the role play.

Volunteers then role played the group's solution to the problem. This role play was video-taped and then replayed to the participants, allowing for feedback from peers and the trainer. During this feedback period it is important that the trainer find and positively reinforce affective actions as well as insure that constructive criticism is given. Stopping the tape and replaying critical behaviors allows the participants to actually see and hear what they were doing.

After several rounds of role-playing the master tape was allowed to continue and the participants viewed the supervisor effectively resolve the problem. This provided a role-model for future scenarios.

Also, in order to build trust and encourage risk- taking on the part of the participants the tapes made of their role plays were erased during the session to assure them of confidentiality.

TEACHING APPLICATIONS

This technique can be used with similar success in the classroom. For undergraduate students, it would provide them with a feeling of what it's like to be confronted with "real" supervisory problems. It can provide an opportunity to practice managing and to point out the difficulties in influencing people even with theoretical knowledge. Graduate students with working experience would get a chance to sharpen their skills, not unlike the industrial participants. They can compare their own experiences with the scenarios in determining how to handle the situation. Discrepancies between what they think they can do and what they actually do can also create an awareness in graduate students that further skill building is necessary in addition to the accumulation of theoretical concepts.

One of the things that we focus on in the classroom is the discrepancy between verbal and non-verbal messages in difficult interpersonal situations. We have found the CRM McGraw-Hill film titled "Communication, The Nonverbal Agenda" very helpful in pointing out the importance of consistency between verbal and nonverbal messages. The practice and video feedback utilized in this approach is one of the best ways to develop the needed consistency to accurately communicate and successfully influence subordinates.

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